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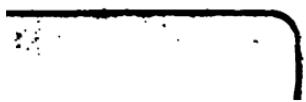
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THE
ISLE OF TEMPTATION

BY
ARTHUR STANLEY COLLETON



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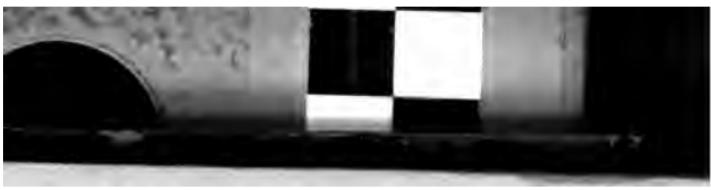
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THE ISLE OF TEMPTATION



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PREFACE

SOONER or later the conventional mirror in which we see the strange pageant of life must be broken. In this process it is inevitable that the realist lay emphasis not upon beauty and goodness, which stalk, mere abstract puppets, across the mild pages of the New England novelist, but that he depict, unflinchingly, the everlasting impulses that sway the majority of men. The world, as Matthew Arnold pointed out, lives by its prejudices and its passions, not by its reason or its soul. An honest record of that life, concerned not with irrelevant detail, but giving its essential motives, will achieve no school-book lesson, but that fundamental moral energy which is inseparable from sincerity and truth.

Our hero (to use the old romantic term) is a youth of the American middle-class. He has, like so many others, drifted from the evangelical moorings of his fathers; he comes to New York, that mighty Enchantress, the strange and multiform currents of whose life so few have



PREFACE

yet discerned; he is conquered by her vivid allurements, but emerges from the fire of her turbulent passions nearer in spirit to the central truths of life.

Our heroine, by a fit of contrast, is a product of the city. Denied the glittering pleasures, the elegancies, the pantomimic loves which flaunt themselves in New York; driven back upon the humdrum life in which she finds no playground for her sentimental heart and her curious senses, she reaches out violently after her pitiful dreams, of which her soul perishes at last.

Around these central figures group themselves naturally various types of the world as well as of the half-world, all slaves of the Enchantress—save one.

To let these figures go through a shadowy gesture-dance would have been futile and foolish. They are stripped bare here, not of their own hypocrisies, for they have few, but of the hypocrisies of the “general reader.” Those are invited to these pages whose vision knows no fear, who desire to see the real, knowing that only from the contemplation of truth a larger wisdom can be wrung.

A. S. C.

THE ISLE OF TEMPTATION

PART ONE

I

HERBERT VINCENT closed the door of his room, drew down the yellow shade of its single window, and lit the gaunt gas-jet. The fan-like flame burst forth with an angry roar, and Herbert surveyed the few feet of space which were, so long as he could pay eight dollars a week, his own. The sight was a disheartening one. A bedstead, a chiffonier and an armchair furnished the room. All three were of maplewood, painted a yellowish-brown colour and adorned with lines of a dirty chocolate shade. Meaningless excrescences of pressed wood were stuck on with a blank symmetry of effect. Nor was it possible, for an instant, to avoid the sight of

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these deformities. They filled the room, and Herbert found it difficult to approach the trunk (set at the foot of the bed), which, in his present desolation, was his only symbol of the kindness of a human home.

Without sounded the multiform noises of the great city, but to Herbert, behind the walls of his room, they blended into a single dull roar, the fit voice, it seemed to him, of the iron-hearted monster which is New York. It was his first day here and so far his heart knew only a blind rebellion. He had seen little as yet, but that little struck him as presenting always the same unlovely qualities—a grim hardness of outline, a cold uniformity of colour. Even the great university, with its dome and terraces of an almost Roman stateliness, only accentuated his longing for a small, far college building hidden in its secular ivy. It needed all the somewhat conscious manhood of his three-and-twenty years to keep him from breaking down in the midst of this vast homelessness, and he found himself welcoming, with a shameful eagerness, the sullen negro boy who announced that dinner was served.

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He entered the dining-room in the basement of the house with his first pleasant sensation here—an expectance of human contact. Every seat at the table was taken except one, to which he was assigned. For a moment the bright electric bulbs blinded him; then he looked about him at the company assembled here. His immediate survey had the result of making him feel dingy. The personages that he saw were not only richly dressed, but had the high colouring, the hard clearness of eye, that accompany the constant satisfaction of desire. There was no worn forehead here, no hollow cheek. Men and women seemed encased in an enamel of prosperity, innocent of the slightest crack, and Herbert wondered at so much magnificence in a place where the highest charges exceeded those he paid by but a few paltry dollars.

He had a more intimate view of his neighbours. At his left sat a young woman who seemed to him the most completely beautiful person that he had ever seen—of a fierce beauty, with black eyes and almost scarlet lips. The dark gown, without a fold, revealed her

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delicately mature form, and her masses of hair exhaled a heady fragrance as she stirred. At Herbert's right loomed a more massive form—a large, sensual man of middle age, red-headed and red-bearded, with humourous, greedy eyes behind thick lenses. He leaned, past Herbert, toward the dark lady.

“Where is the doctor to-night?” he whispered audibly.

She shrugged her curving shoulders with fliprant despair.

“I’m sure I don’t know, Mr. Doyle.”

The man laughed.

“Will you come with me and hear ‘The Merry Widow’ to-night?”

She looked straight before her with a look of immense disdain, and shook her head.

Doyle turned to Herbert and introduced himself.

“You’re a student at the University?”

Herbert assented.

“I’m a Princeton man,” Doyle said. “School of Engineering.”

Herbert wanted to continue the conversation,

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but a strange diffidence came over him. He felt himself in the presence of alien forces, and wondered whether they were typical of the life of the city. When dinner was over he saw Doyle approach the dark lady, but she eluded him and vanished up the stairs. Doyle turned into the large, half-dark parlour, and Herbert, impelled by a vague desire for companionship, followed. He saw the eyes of the other man rest upon him.

“Going anywhere in particular to-night?”

Herbert shook his head.

“I only came to New York this morning.”

“Come out for a walk with me, then. I’m a grass widower.”

The man laughed repulsively, but Herbert, in his loneliness, could not master the temptation. He went for his hat and coat and met Doyle at the door. They stepped out into the cold, clear night. A prophecy of frost, definite almost as a scent, hung in the atmosphere. It was easy to walk swiftly in this keen air, and their heels touched the pavement with metallic

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clicks. Doyle accompanied their steps by a running stream of talk.

“Did you notice Mrs. Earle at the house?”

“The lady at my left?”

“Yes; isn’t she a stunner? Poor woman! She’s got a crazy fellow for a husband. He gets drunk every night and throws dishes at her.”

Herbert felt himself grow pale at the vision which Doyle’s words evoked. It seemed to his inexperienced mind that the last disgrace of humanity had just been stripped brutally naked before his eyes.

“And what does she do?” he asked breathlessly.

“She doesn’t do a thing; she’s a fool about that man; she ought to leave him.”

To this summary judgment Herbert found it impossible to assent, and they both fell silent as they turned into the clangour of Eighth Avenue and passed the glittering rows of small shops that line it. Suddenly Doyle stopped.

“You want to see some fun?”

Herbert looked up and saw in the grey eyes

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beside him a strange and vivid gleam, half humorous, half alluring. It seemed to him full of worldly knowledge and keen temptation. He yielded to it.

“Yes; I haven’t anything to do.”

Their pace grew more rapid; the shops flew past them. When, in the near distance, they saw the dark masses of the foliage of Central Park, with silver leaves twinkling here and there under the rays of an electric lamp, they turned westward into a side-street. A few minutes more brought them to the sound of riotous music and the sight of a row of tall windows splashing the dark pavement with yellow squares. Doyle led the way into the dance-hall, and invited Herbert to a seat at a small iron table, which stood, with many similar ones, upon a raised platform that bordered, on all sides, the large, waxed central space of the hall. There couples—well-dressed young men and women—were swinging in the languid mazes of a waltz, but even to Herbert’s innocent eyes it was clear that the men held the women in a violent grasp, that the bodies of the dancers

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swayed in a wild and passionate unison, and that in every eye glimmered the flicker of unabashed desire. He felt himself terribly moved—and ashamed, for a hot flush passed over his body and a moisture gathered under his eyelids. His dry lips greedily sought the beer which his companion had ordered. As he set the glass down his eyes met Doyle's. In the latter's there was a frank amusement now.

“Haven't you seen this kind of thing before?”

It seemed suddenly a wretched thing to have to acknowledge an inexperience so complete.

“Not exactly.”

Doyle emptied his glass.

“The girls aren't a bad sort—shop-girls and hello-girls. Few of them take money. The ones who sit at the tables and wait for fellows to treat 'em are the worst. They're gone on the booze. Look at 'em.”

Herbert looked, and saw at once that the isolated women sitting at the tables here and there were older than the dancers and had a wearier air. Powder and paint, heavily laid on, ob-

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scured their features. Their eyes had a glazed look, and when their arms moved their heavy bracelets clinked and rattled like chains. But he was calmer now and observed that Doyle looked carefully at all who entered by the street door.

“Are you waiting for anyone?” he asked.

“H-m, yes. I met a girl here the other night —a peach, I tell you. Funny sort of girl, too. Seemed to have lots of money and wouldn’t take a cent. I don’t see what she’s doing here; but Lord! you can never tell.”

They waited yet a few minutes, and then Doyle sprang up and hastened in the direction of the door. Herbert’s eyes, following him, saw him meet a young woman of somewhat less than middle height, who permitted herself to be led to their table. Doyle pushed her gently into the third hitherto vacant chair.

“Lucy, a friend of mine.”

The girl turned slowly toward Herbert with a languid “How d’ye do?” Then she let her vague eyes travel slowly across the hall, and he could watch her. She was rather stout than

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otherwise, though not ungraceful, and all her limbs had a soft, rich curve. Her bodice revealed, through the meshes of a deep lace yoke, the creamy whiteness of her flesh. Her arms, which were really beautiful, were bare above the elbow. The face was a strange one: heavily moulded as to chin and cheek, the lips large and sullen, the eyes dark, dreamy and slumbrous. From the whole figure breathed, like a heavy perfume, the deep enchantment of the senses. The body seemed eloquent: "In me is no resistance, no coldness, no thought, but the rich fulfillment and end of all desire." She seemed chary of speech, not because she was reserved, but because she had no need of it.

A waiter approached the table and she ordered a whiskey-sour, paying for it with a fifty-dollar bill. When the change came she threw it, carelessly and without counting, into her purse. A great blue diamond glowed on her hand, which was white and soft, but coarsely shaped. Under the small, round table she thrust her knees against Herbert's, apparently unconscious of the action. He felt as if some magical

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ichor surged up in his blood and stung him through and through with its unimaginable sweetness. His manhood had found him, and straightway the high, immaculate years of his youth fell backward into the darkness of time and became to him as a half-forgotten legend.

He leaned forward and spoke to her eagerly. But instead of answering she only looked at him blankly, and Doyle threw back his head and laughed. Herbert flushed, but was immediately conscious of his mistake. He had addressed her as he would have addressed a young lady at home. In a moment he conquered his chagrin and tried again.

“Do you come here every evening?”

“Pretty near,” she answered. “Don’t you?”

“I’ve never been here before.”

“How funny!” was all she replied.

Another round of drinks was served, and another. Lucy ordered whiskey-sours steadily; Doyle and Herbert drank beer. As the minutes passed, the hall became more and more crowded, the dancers jostled against each other

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on the smooth floor, the tobacco smoke hung in a great, bluish cloud under the ceiling. The women at the tables had found companions of the other sex. The music seemed to blare and shrill in a desperate attempt to keep step with the mad mazes of the dance. Doyle, whose eyes were bloodshot and whose red beard seemed to flame, moved nearer to Lucy and laid his large hand on her bare arm. The action roused Herbert. He felt as though he had been struck. The blood left his face and a mad, white heat of jealousy possessed him. He sprang up, and his glass shivered, crashingly, to the floor. Words, terrible and incoherent, struggled in his hot throat. But all he uttered was a hoarse cry, thick and inarticulate. Doyle got up heavily.

“Look here, old sport,” he said, “you don’t know how to carry your liquor. Suppose we go?”

Lucy arose, breathing audibly. Her lips were half open, and between the two rows of her small, white teeth lay quivering a pink tip of tongue. The white bosom under the lace bodice rose and fell. Somehow, though the method

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was not clear to Herbert, they reached the door and went out into the cold and quiet street.

He stood still and took off his hat. The cold wind blew through his soft hair and over his hot eyes, and his vision cleared. Doyle took Lucy's arm, and, as if it were a most natural thing, she offered Herbert the other. It nestled in the hollow of his own, the little gloved fingers intertwining with his. A cold fever shook him. He had never before known the touch of a woman whose living flesh could be approached by any road but that of reverence. Now the arm that lay in his, lay there with an ease and familiarity of abandon that burned him through and through. And the eyes under the large, black hat seemed to have awakened, and glanced searchingly at his pale face.

Doyle jested over their adventure and announced that he and Lucy must escort Herbert home. He wanted to protest. The daring hope came to him subtly that the girl might even prefer him. But he remained silent. He could think of no words that were not quite shameless, and these he could not utter. He only knew

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that he could have slain the coarse, fat man and carried off the white and quivering prey of his desire.

At the door-step of the boarding-house they said a last and laughing good-night and left him. But Lucy bent back once more and laid her hand on his arm.

“Coming over to-morrow?”

“Yes,” he stammered; “yes.”

Then they went. He saw them walk down the street, and a physical sickness of jealousy and baulked desire swept over him as his excited imagination pictured the night that they would pass together. . . .

He ran up the steps of the so-called stoop and put his hand on the door-knob. It was moveless. Outer and inner doors had both been locked, and he had forgotten to ask the landlady for a latch-key. He pressed a finger on the button of the electric bell and heard it trill far off in the silent house. He tried again, but no sound answered him. His watch told him that it was nearly one o’clock, and he turned

away, determined to abide the coming of the dawn.

Aimlessly he walked through the hollow streets, moved beyond measure at the accident that had befallen him. Like an outcast he wandered in the depth of the night, his mind filled by the unbearable vision of Doyle and Lucy—like the outcast that, in a sense, he had always been. The home of his childhood arose before him: the little white house in the clear, smokeless air. He thought of his father's face, the clear, joyous eyes, the red cheeks over the grizzled beard, the forehead on which dwelt the serenity of a secure faith. His mother's face was a little more careworn, for the children had been many and quick in coming, but her heart, he knew, was even now, in the abysmal night, vigilant for the welfare, temporal and eternal, of her first-born. He wondered, a tragic contrition in his soul, how he could ever have thought those dear people limited and inflexible in their impossible beliefs and contradictory loyalties, and even the hideous Methodist Church, which for some years he had refused to enter, ap-

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peared before him in its most gracious guise when, on a summer morning, the shadows of the elm-trees quivered and swayed upon its yellow walls.

The sharp air bit into him, and he walked westward swiftly. At a corner, under a street-lamp, a woman accosted him:

“Want to have a good time to-night?”

He looked into the unnatural, cold-pinched face. The terribly old-looking eyes fawned upon him, the eager hands clutched his arm; but he hurried on, farther and farther, for the woman had recalled to him a sense of his earlier struggle, and once again came the maddening thought of his defeated yearning. . . .

The library of the university looked grey and forbidding in the moonlight, and spectral shapes seemed at play behind the grave, tall pillars of its portico. Herbert passed it with half-averted eyes, the resounding echo of his footsteps following him afar. Hence he was relieved to tread the yielding sand of Riverside Drive, and walked southward along the stone parapet, covered with autumnal leaves. In his

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soul rang Lucy's last question, the subtle invitation that she had offered. He knew that he would respond, knew that every fibre of his being would drag him to her with irresistible power. But the indomitable Puritan in him murmured old words, whose meaning he had till now but dimly apprehended, hammer-like words concerning the paths of the Strange Woman whose feet led down to Death.

Exhausted, he sank down on a bench, and turned up the collar of his overcoat. The place was very silent, save for the sound of the wind stirring the dried leaves. But gradually a more regular sound mingled with this, a sound of lurching footsteps upon the path. Herbert leaned forward and saw, only a few feet from him, a gleaming shirt-front, and a silk hat pushed far back from a pale face. The figure, wearing a great, flapping, black coat, came up to him and stopped short. An odour of stale whiskey hung about it.

“I say, have you got a match?”

The young man tugged nervously at his short, reddish moustache while Herbert drew

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out his match-case. Then he lit a cigarette and let himself fall wearily upon the seat.

“Thanks.” He drew the smoke deep into his lungs. “My God, but I’ve got a head on me!”

To Herbert the situation seemed grim and full of meaning.

“Why don’t you go home?” he asked.

The young man lifted his light-grey eyes.

“I didn’t remember just where it was till about half an hour ago.” Then he went on with a half-humourous, half-apologetic note in his voice: “I went with a couple of fellows to the Casino; and we picked up some girls there and made a night of it. God! I feel rotten; but it’s all in a life-time.”

“Is it?” Herbert couldn’t help asking.

The pale face bent nearer his.

“You don’t want to be a damn’ prig, do you?”

He lurched to his feet.

“Good-night; I guess I can manage now.”

Herbert saw him depart, and then, too, arose. He was chilled to the bone. The dawn, a pale, tired spectre, crept up in the East, and the tops

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of the trees swayed in the wretched light. Herbert went back over the way by which he had come, pondering the foolish words he had just heard. He knew that he, God help him, would always be a prig in the sense of the chance companion of the night, but he knew also that his first day in New York had awakened in him a thing stronger than all the perishable creeds and moralities of man; that the woman—herself but a blind instrument of fate—had tempted him, and that he would eat.

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Next morning, after some hours of restless sleep, the world had failed to adjust itself. With a vague hope that it would do so, Herbert had stepped at five o'clock into the grey chill of his room. But his awakening brought him the sharp knowledge that a harder problem than the light perplexities of earlier years assailed him. He had a dull, sinking sensation in his chest; he dared not think of the events of last night, so terrible was the emotion that the memory called forth, and yet he could think of nothing else. He shut his eyes involuntarily and saw every line of Lucy's face, every curve of her body. All that he had dreaded in his impotent fury had now come to pass, and a nervous shudder shook his limbs.

He went down to the dining-room to find the broken remains of breakfast on the spotted cloth.

Mrs. Earle, more quietly beautiful than last night in a light silk kimono, sat at the board, and opposite her appeared the large motley-skinned face of Mrs. Price, the landlady, wisps of yellowish grey hair blowing angrily about it. The two women bade Herbert good-morning, and while the butler brought him two soiled-looking eggs and a cup of tepid coffee, continued their conversation in audible whispers.

“Just think,” Mrs. Earle said, “the doctor didn’t come home till two.”

The older woman shook her head.

“Where does he spend his time?”

Again Herbert saw the shrug of those exquisite shoulders.

“Gracious knows!” She bent forward secretly. “I don’t think it’s women.”

A smile in which sympathy and spite were subtly blended overspread Mrs. Price’s face.

“I wouldn’t be so sure; men have the strangest tastes.”

Mrs. Earle’s mouth twitched.

“I don’t care what it is; I don’t care what! But I won’t stand for it much longer. We



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women are all fools. There's Kate Bathurst. She ran away with him when she was sixteen; she isn't thirty yet, and look at the hell she lives in! Then here's me. To look at the doctor you'd think him a perfect gentleman. And he's a drunkard and maybe a——”

“Shh!” Mrs. Price said, looking at Herbert. Mrs. Earle raised her voice.

“I don't care! He can't live in the house a week without knowing about it.” She arose angrily. “But I know what I'll do.”

“Don't do anything rash,” Mrs. Price counselled.

A burst of bitter but beautifully liquid laughter from the stairs was all her answer. Then she turned to Herbert.

“It's perfectly dreadful, you know. She drove her husband to drink by her extravagance. He's an assistant in a large dental office, and makes thirty dollars a week. Do you suppose that can pay for her gowns and her jewellery? And he loves her and likes to give her what she wants. So he drinks. That's the whole story.”

“It's very unfortunate,” Herbert stammered,

unused to such confidences. Then he got up under Mrs. Price's cold and disapproving glance, the reason for which he could not divine, and went out. But the words which he had heard clung to his memory. "What a life!" he muttered. "My God, what a life!" The sudden suspicion smote upon him that the calm happiness which seemed to brood over every home he had known in his native city might often be but a mask skillfully drawn over discords just as sordid. Angrily he dismissed the thought as an unworthy one. Faith and loyalty and honour must still reign in the world, though he himself was wandering in strange places and thirsting after the worship of alien gods.

He had already missed the first lecture which he should have attended at the university that morning. But he knew that attendance was not strictly compulsory on graduate students. He determined to go to the second one on his schedule, though he realised clearly enough that all his intellectual interests had been suddenly swept away, that they seemed cold and far, compared to the burning thoughts, stronger than he,

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that thronged his aching head. In his ignorance of the city, he didn't even know where to find the dance-hall. . . . He would not be taken there by Doyle. . . .

The halls of the university seemed to him cold and formal; his fellow-students unfriendly, not because of any intellectual absorption, but from carelessness. A swarthy-bearded professor, scrupulously groomed and having the appearance of a prosperous business man rather than that of a scholar, lectured on certain aspects of formal rhetoric. The thoughts he enunciated were not new, the lecture was neither well-built nor well-phrased; but, looking round, Herbert saw the rows of men and women bent low over their note-books, slavishly eager not to miss a word of the stream of commonplace talk that flowed thinly from the rostrum.

He was relieved when the hour was over, and yet sick at heart with disappointment. In his small, poorly equipped home college he had dreamed with a high, intellectual ardour of the great university, picturing to himself the onslaught of new and pregnant ideas that he would

there experience, priding himself upon the power of enthusiastic assimilation which he knew himself to possess. Thus, for a moment, his very chagrin threw him back into the circle of his real interests, though he was, all the while, deeply aware of the battle which the day yet held for him.

He loitered for a few minutes on the rectangular brick pavement of the airy campus, and then returned for his second lecture.

It was now a grave and gentle face, marked by deep thought and long vigil, that, from the professorial chair, overlooked the students; a note of kindness and humane seriousness were blended in the voice that addressed the class. But the lecture—perhaps because the professor's mind was unconsciously subdued to the atmosphere in which it worked, perhaps because even an avowed external pressure silenced the true voice of his thought—the lecture revamped the commonplaces of an hundred text-books and manuals. There was no attempt to take a philosophic view of literary phenomena; there was no freshness or incisiveness of judgement.

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It was like the repetition of a liturgy worn threadbare by the mouthings of many years, empty of all vitality and strength.

Next to Herbert sat a dapper youth, wearing already the small, blond, pointed beard which, together with a pseudo-British pronunciation and a stock of quietly elegant clothes, is the surest means of attaining distinction in contemporary American scholarship. The lecture over, he bent a trifle nearer.

“May I ask—I’m really ashamed to be obliged to do so—which one of Prior’s ‘Tales’ Professor Carrington singled out for special comment?”

“I’m afraid I wasn’t listening,” Herbert said, laughing.

A curiously cold look came into the other’s greenish eyes. A slim white hand wandered in momentary perplexity to a heavy scarf-pin.

“Ah, yes.”

Herbert felt a subtle irritation.

“The lecture didn’t strike me as very good, and so I stopped listening. I’ve heard all he said so often before.”

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The exquisite person's air became the perfection of well-bred iciness.

"Professor Carrington is head of the department—a great scholar and a great teacher. I thought his lecture unusually illuminating."

When the class disbanded, Herbert, glancing backward from the door, saw his recent neighbour in close conference with Professor Carrington. Upon the fellow's face glowed a smile of reverent discipleship, and the great scholar, innocently stroking his beard, accepted the subtle adulation of the adroit time-server.

That moment gave birth to Herbert's antagonism to the great institution from whose preëminent influence he had promised himself so much. He divined, from the scene he had just witnessed, all that his later experience so tragically confirmed—the complete absence of a spirit of intelligent dissent, the hollow flattery of professorial authority. For, with the professors rested, at the year's end, the distribution of appointments, and men and women who in their heart of hearts were conscious of the dullness, the inefficiency, the prejudice and pedantry of

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the current system of teaching, lied their souls black day after day, in the hope of some small preferment. . . .

He walked back to his boarding-house for luncheon, entering it from the basement, and going straight to the dining-room. There he found Mrs. Earle and another woman, a slight, indefinite figure of less than middle height, with fluffy ash-blonde hair and a pair of large, blue eyes. The eyes were dreamy and full of a wavering discontent. Mrs. Earle introduced her friend as Mrs. Bathurst, and Herbert recalled, with a sense of pain, what he had heard of the woman's history. Mrs. Earle chattered brightly.

"Our landlady has gone out to-day in all her war-paint. She looked frightful; but we'll have something to eat for once. Sit down, Mr. Vincent; there, Kate, you take that chair. I've spoken to the butler."

They took their seats, and at once the meal was served.

"Well," Mrs. Earle continued, addressing her friend, "how's Andy?"

Mrs. Bathurst seemed to shiver.

"He hasn't been very well. He fusses about the flat because it's small and stuffy. We're going to move and take a house."

"Good heavens! You can't afford that."

Mrs. Bathurst sighed with a trifle of ostentation.

"I'm going to look for a house in the Bronx and try to get a couple of roomers."

"And work yourself to death for that great, hulking coward! And you have such a lovely figure, Kitty."

Mrs. Bathurst smiled.

"Don't be shameless, dear." Then, turning to Herbert, she said: "She's only joking."

The other woman laughed.

"Am I? Oh, you can play the sweet innocent. But I don't know that you want to be a convenience and a beast of burden any more than I. Maybe Mr. Vincent here would like some time to leave the—ahem!—Price mansion, and take one of your rooms."

Herbert leaned forward.

"Will it be far from this neighbourhood?"



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"Oh, yes," Mrs. Bathurst said; "it's in the Bronx, you know."

"Well, you see," he said, "I have to be near the university; I am studying there."

Mrs. Bathurst looked at him with renewed interest, but Mrs. Earle's chatter prevented any more intimate talk between them. He asked the two women to let him have Mrs. Bathurst's new address, when it should be decided upon, in the event of his wanting a room at any time, since he would have to live in New York for at least two years. He looked at Kate Bathurst's face. The strange restlessness of her eyes attracted him, and yet filled him with a vague pity. He took a faintly regretful leave of her and climbed the stairs to his little room on the top floor.

He tried to write letters home, but the pen slipped from his fingers; he handled one book after another upon the shelf that hung at the head of the wooden bed, but each seemed more unattractive than the last. The structure of his life was disintegrating under the onslaught of forces which he himself did not wholly under-

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stand. A few days ago all his purposes had seemed firm, his road straight. To-day, like a ship that had broken the restraining cable, he drifted upon the first fierce surges of an alien sea. . . .

A knock sounded at the door, and he opened it to admit the large figure of Doyle.

"D'y^{ou} feel all right to-day?"

"Ah, yes, well enough."

"H-m! what do you think? Lucy gave me the cold shoulder with a vengeance last night. I took her to her house and, of course, started to go upstairs with her. By Gad, sir, she turned round and said: 'What do you want to come up for?' Well, I made myself pretty plain, and she just hauled off and told me to go to hell."

The big man seemed to ponder as upon some serious problem.

"It beats the Dutch the way those women act. Lucy's got her eye on you."

"Do you think so?" The words wrenched themselves from Herbert before he knew it.

"Sure! I'd go to the Palace to-night, if I were you."

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“Where is it?”

Doyle gave him the direction and then turned away sadly.

“You see, I’m getting too old for the young ones. But, Lord! a couple of years from now and she’ll be only too glad to have me pick her up on Twenty-third Street. They all get there sooner or later.”

He went out, and Herbert sat quietly, moving no muscle. The minutes passed—an hour passed. The day waned, and into this little room, where no great light ever came, the shadows crept. Herbert’s head sank upon his chest, but through the darkness stared his watchful eyes. He did not answer the call to dinner; the thought of food repelled him. He arose only when his hot throat and lips could bear the drouth no longer, but water had lost all power to quench his thirst. A blind impulse carried him forth from the room and house into the cold currents of the outer air.

His power of willing had deserted him since he could not summon the desire to will. The involuntary images that, creeping into the mind,

rule us with a necessity so relentless, these images were all carnal now. Had he been capable of reasoning concerning them, no doubt but he would have passed upon them an ethical judgement in accordance with the purity of his training and his essential nature. But of this very power to reason life had bereft him. And it was the name of "Lucy, Lucy," that thundered in his blood. . . .

He found her sitting at the same table at which they had sat last night, the shadow of an enigmatical smile upon her heavy features.

"I'm awf'ly glad to see you," she said.

He sat down beside her, struggling for words that would not come. She moved closer to him and laid her hand on his under the table. He almost held his breath, as if in fear of breaking some magic spell. The vulgar music, the riotous dancing, which in a saner mood would have repelled him, served only to feed the cruel flame within him.

"Ain't that fellow Doyle the limit?" she asked.

"He doesn't seem so bad," Herbert returned.

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“Ah, he makes me tired. Those old fellows are so low; there’s nothing decent about them.”

A couple of university undergraduates in well-cut suits and light slouch-hats came up to the table.

“Hello, Lucy! I haven’t seen you in a coon’s age!” one cried.

A sullen look came into her face.

“You go and chase yourselves!”

“Off with the old love, on with the new,” the older of the students quoted. “Well, Lucy, you are a case!”

The two strolled off to another table, and Lucy got up.

“Let’s go,” she said. “I’m tired.”

He helped her on with her wrap, and the tips of his fingers touched her warm, moist flesh. They went out, their bodies pressing close against each other. They had walked only a few blocks when Lucy stopped before a gaunt flat-house.

“Come on!” she said with a kind of breathless seriousness.

He followed her up the steep, dim, dusty stairs

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and along a corridor to the door of a flat. She opened the door and led him into a fair-sized room, in which glimmered a single yellow point of gaslight. She turned it up with a swift movement and slipped behind a curtain that shut off one corner of the room. Herbert stood still and looked upon the graceful dressing-table, the heavy brass bed, the little, luxurious nothings that lay about the room. He stood still and inhaled the subtle scent of the woman's intimate life that maddens and entralls. Then he turned and saw. She had taken off her street dress and put on a loose dressing-gown that fell away from her round, white shoulders and her throbbing neck. Her hair, heavy and odourous, hung down in silken folds. She took his cold hand between her soft palms and said:

“Come!”

III

LUCY TREAT devoted herself to Herbert with a child-like faithfulness that moved him deeply. She mended his clothes, sewed on his buttons, and assumed gradually an air of gentle proprietorship. The declaration of her feelings was as simple and as drastic as her whole nature:

“I think you’re awf’ly nice, Bertie; I just love you.”

At first he had faint stirrings of pride that was largely a pride of class. He tried occasionally to assume the attitude which, he supposed, the man of the world sustains to the “fallen woman.” But as the weeks passed, he more and more dropped his consciousness of that depraved brutality which respectable people look upon as the saving propriety of a loathsome situation. He came to spend more and more of

his time in Lucy's room, reading there, studying there, dreaming there. Since he knew that he would go to her in the evening it seemed each day increasingly tiresome and difficult to go first to his boarding-house, and he soon abandoned the futile effort.

But it was at night that his hardest struggle came. On this one point he had prayed that he might not have the weakness to yield. He did not want to disgrace himself by being absent from his room during the hours of sleep. And for many days he held himself to his pitiless purpose. It took, one should consider, a degree of manly strength by no means common to go from Lucy's side, from the warm, scented lassitude of her room, out into the freezing streets and finally into the icy hall-bedroom at Mrs. Price's. Lucy protested once or twice, though without importunity. She could not see how the tenure and decent occupancy of his own room had become to him the last entrenchment of his social self.

In November, however, came an evening of iron cold. Rain had fallen and frozen into

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sleet; man and beast staggered upon uncertain footing before the knife-like wind, and Herbert, peculiarly sensitive to these extremities of cold, fought his painful way down the dimness of Manhattan Avenue. He had to keep his eyes fixed steadily on the ground and hardly noticed the rare passers-by. Suddenly he was heavily jostled by two men, slipped on the polished flags, and fell. He had tried to recover his balance and in the effort had wrenched his ankle. Painfully he dragged his way along the street and, coming to the house where Lucy lived, he had to rest again and again on the cold stairs which stretched up many flights.

The room was warm, soft, exquisite, his one refuge from pain and cold and bitter loneliness. A more human light than he had yet found there arose in Lucy's eyes when he told her of his mishap. She helped him take off his clothes. She sat before him bathing and bandaging his aching ankle. And that one kindly action completed his downfall. He leaned forward and kissed her with a kiss in which passion had no

part. But morning found him still beside her, his head upon her white, round arm. . . .

He sat up, leaning upon his elbow, and looked at her still sleeping. The night-dress had fallen open at her throat; her breath came lightly and evenly. She looked so fresh, so young, so calm as she slept, that he could hardly believe her to be the woman that she was, the woman whom the gods had cursed with passions so exorbitant, so unappeasable. . . . Slowly she opened her eyes and looked at him, he thought, with an air of triumph.

“How’s your ankle, Bertie?”

“All right,” he said coldly. “I’ll have to hurry off.”

She put her arms around him and drew his head to her shoulder.

“Don’t be silly; we’ll have breakfast first.”

She sprang up, and throwing a light gown over her shoulders, busied herself at a little gas-stove that stood in a corner. Herbert tried to get up, but the very touch of his injured foot to the floor caused him a sharp twinge, and he sank back upon the warm pillows. Then he

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yielded to that soft delight of the body and watched the wintry sun creep slowly into the window. Lucy came to him with fruit and coffee, and sat down beside him.

“Come, dearie, have your breakfast!”

They ate and drank together, and Herbert found himself wishing that he might forget the hardships that his own manhood imposed on him and dwell for ever in this exquisite ease. Yet he could not look upon her without a rankling irritation, for her content was the content of the victor, his the slothful submission of the vanquished. She piled his plate with ruddy grapes from which the slow sunlight struck their central fire. For the hundredth time—since she would scarcely take a present, far less money at his hands—he asked sharply:

“How do you pay for all this, Lucy?”

She rested her chin on her hands, and looked at him curiously.

“Why do you want to know so bad?”

Her level tone exasperated him.

“Because you won’t let me—pay you.”

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A slow red, whether of anger or of shame he could not tell, crept over her face and neck.

"I've got money enough to last me for a while," she said, "and I love you. So why don't you stop bothering?"

For the first time her voice broke, but her distress gave him a cruel pleasure.

"And where does the money come from?"

"A friend gave it to me," she said, slowly. "I came with him from Rochester. He was a drummer, and I stayed with him for four months. Then he had to go out West. He gave me six hundred dollars."

A sharp pain quivered through Herbert's nerves. He knew, of course, that he had not been the first man in Lucy's life. But he had reconciled himself to the thought of his predecessors as chance companions of a moment of passion, from the stain of whose touch the long intimacy with him seemed, as he persuaded himself, to have purified Lucy. The story that she told him now stung him through and through. That daily and nightly closeness to her had been another's; another had possessed her wholly

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for an even longer period than he. His fevered and self-torturing imagination painted the vision of her in an hundred situations in which they had been together. Only it was not himself that he saw in her arms, but another. In a jealous agony he overwhelmed her with questions concerning the man who, according to her story, seemed to have been a flashily handsome person, humourous and unmoral, but not heartless. He had persuaded her to flee from her home in Rochester, and go with him. Then, desiring to travel farther, he had gone, leaving her a thick roll of greenbacks. Detail after detail Herbert dragged from her in his impotent fury, until she sprang up, red-eyed, nervous, worn out.

"I don't see what difference it makes to you. You wasn't the first. You know that. He wasn't either."

"Do you know who was?" he asked, bitterly.
". . . a boy . . . at school . . . long ago, . . ." she faltered, and then flung herself forward on the bed with dry, convulsive sobs.

Setting his lips rigidly, he got up and trod by preference upon his aching limb. So this was the woman for whom he was forsaking his ideals, his friends, his own manhood; through whose influence his very letters home had become brief and infrequent. He had fallen, indeed. His flesh trembled with the upheaval of his nerves as he dressed himself. It must end here and now. Softly he went up to the little table in the centre of the room, and placed on it a pocketbook that held all his small store of money. The harlot should not be cheated of her hire. . . . Then he limped toward the door. He opened it and took a last look. She was still lying on the bed, but stirless now. The soft silk gown clung to her body and revealed its alluring form. His heart sank within him. Others would now possess all that had been his own. . . . But the searing memory came to him; he was but one of her many lovers. . . . He passed through the door and closed it softly behind him. He had vindicated his human dignity, and felt as though death here and here-

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after were better than the barren wretchedness of the life that now confronted him.

The streets were dry and clean; the sun shone with a mild radiance, but it did not warm him. A terrible regret burned in him, a regret as though he had left behind him all that was desirable upon earth. Subtle sophistries arose in his mind. Had he not saved her from more violent pollution? Had she not abstained almost entirely from strong drink in the weeks of their intimacy? Had any other human soul in this vast city had for him any kindness or compassion or love? . . .

It occurred to him that it was Saturday morning, that the money for his board and room had really been due on the day before, and that he was penniless. To write home for money would be both absurd and cruel. The monthly allowance came from there at the expense of sacrifices of which he dared not think. Nor had he made a single friend from whom he could borrow a few dollars. Lucy had absorbed all his life, and his perfunctory attendance upon his duties at the University had made him an object

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of cold suspicion and neglect. Hence it was necessary for him to earn some money, and to earn it at once. He bethought him that the University helped poor students to find work. But he could not seek the officer in charge of the employment bureau until he had changed his clothes, and that meant a visit to the boarding-house. It meant, above all, an interview with Mrs. Price. He dreaded that large face with its metallic eyes; he dreaded the refusal which now, of all times, he must give her.

The pain in his ankle forced him to walk slowly, and yet he seemed to reach his destination with horrible swiftness. Nor was his doom delayed. In the hall Mrs. Price suddenly emerged from the portières that separated the hall from the dining-room. His foot was on the stairs, but her look compelled him to stop. Her voice purred with an undertone of steel.

“Don’t you want to see me this morning, Mr. Vincent?”

He had a sense of a thousand invisible presences beholding his shame. The skin of his whole body tingled; his tongue clove to the roof

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of his mouth, and he had to swallow quickly and painfully.

“I can’t see you for a few days, Mrs. Price—a very few.”

Her voice rose, till to his fevered imagination it became as the boom of heavy bells. Its raucous insolence deafened him.

“You can’t see me, eh? You can stay out all night and throw your money away, but you can’t pay your honest debts. And your trunk isn’t worth keeping, even.”

A door above opened and the fine, shapely head of Mrs. Earle leaned over the balustrade.

“I wouldn’t advertise it to the neighbours, Mrs. Price.”

“People ought to mind their own business,” the woman cried. But she turned away, and Herbert walked slowly up the stairs. When he came to the upper landing Mrs. Earle was nowhere to be seen. The delicacy of her swift withdrawal was a touch of balm to his bruised spirit. But he felt as keenly degraded as though he had been beaten in a public square before the hot glances of many men. Come to his own

room he threw himself on the bed and dug his teeth mercilessly into his lip. Outside the window a fat sparrow sat on a clothes-line, and turned its little head about from side to side. Then, suddenly, it stretched its bedraggled wings and shot upward into the blue air. The simple sight roused in Herbert a great yearning. He saw in his mind's eye an old house in a quiet and beautiful street within sight of the tall masts of happy adventurous ships, within hearing of the boom of immemorial surges. He sat up and his lids burned. He was held by a chain of circumstances, strong and unbreakable, and his immediate duty was plain.

He got up, changed his clothes and went out. He did not turn into the dining-room to eat his luncheon, for he would not risk another immediate contact with Mrs. Price. But the cold air of the street revived him and gave him a momentary energy that carried him quickly, despite the pain in his ankle, to the office of the secretary who found employment for students. He was glad now that at the beginning of the academic year he had enrolled his name on the

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secretary's list. For that gentleman knew him, received him with true friendliness and gave him a card bearing the name of Mrs. Brachmann on East Eightieth Street.

"The lady," said the secretary, "wants a tutor to help her two boys in their schoolwork. The people are wealthy and ought to pay well."

Herbert considered bitterly that he had no car-fare, but he could not bring himself to ask Mr. Wright for the necessary ten cents.

"What pay ought I to demand?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"Not less than a dollar an hour; it's cheap at that."

He prepared himself for the long march downtown and across Central Park, and toiled on at last with his whole consciousness bent upon the throbbing in his ankle. The tall houses passed by him as in a dream, and it seemed to him that he must walk eternally such greyish ways of pain. Finally he turned into the street and stood before the house, which was white and costly, and turned a prosperous roundness to the street.

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A pompous servant led him into a large reception-room, dimly illuminated by a light hidden in the ceiling. The rugs and hangings were of a soft, yet massive luxury; the carving on the woodwork heavy and polished. He sank wearily into a great leather arm-chair and waited. At the end of a few minutes, a small, dark, peevish-looking woman emerged from the dimness of the farther room. She held his card in her hand.

“You are Mr. Vincent?”

He assented.

“Well,” she went on querulously, “I have so much trouble with my boys; they are so wild; they always fight on their way back from school. It’s dreadful. I had a governess for them, but that wouldn’t do. They’re growing older now.” She sighed heavily. “I’d want you to call for them at the school and come home with them, and then look after their lessons.”

The thought of playing nursemaid to two ill-conditioned boys appalled Herbert. But it would, at least, be honest work, and he silently assented once more.

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"And what will you charge?" Mrs. Brachmann asked.

"A dollar an hour for all my time that is taken up."

She looked at him as if half afraid.

"Gracious! We had a governess for my little Gertie; and she looked after the boys' lessons, and she got only thirty dollars a month!"

He got up stiffly, all the blood leaving his face.

"I am not a governess," he said, curtly.

She turned away a little, and then her voice floated to him coaxingly from the background.

"You could have your dinners . . ."

He stumbled blindly out of the house into the dark of the streets, sown now with the multifiform flowers, silver and amber, of the street lamps. An immense discouragement overcame him, and an immense disgust of men and women, and of life itself. In vain he told himself that no external degradation can reach the soul of true manhood, that Mrs. Price and Mrs. Brachmann had but revealed to him the vulgarity of their own hearts. The lash had been upon him, and the wounds stung and burned. Like a

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woman stripped to the cruel gaze of men, his pride writhed, quivering and outraged. . . .

After an apparently endless period the Heights arose before him. How he reached them he never knew. He only knew that he could go no farther, and dropped exhausted on a bench amid the sere, dark trees. The air was still and cold, but he hardly noted it, for his eyes fell to, and a strange slumber enwrapped him. He dreamed of mocking faces of gigantic size and menacing aspect. Their terrible mouths curved in obscene laughter and cried out brutal insults to him. Then, suddenly, the dream changed and he was carried in a boat over the mountainous waves of a dark and furious sea. The spray hissed into his face, and struck it as with innumerable spikes of steel. . . . He awoke to feel a fine drizzle of rain upon his cheeks and forehead and to see a dim, graceful figure stand before him. The figure swayed forward and put two hands on his tired shoulders.

“Bertie!”

She drew him toward her, and his head

rested against her warm body with a sense of infinite relief, of sweet, incomparable rest.

"You hadn't ought to've left all your money in my room this morning. How'd you manage to get along?"

Dear God! She really cared how he had lived; there was one creature here who cared.

"I didn't get along very well, Lucy," he answered.

The gentleness of his voice reassured her.

"Are you coming over, Bertie?" she asked.

"Yes," he said; all his heart in his tone, "yes."

And her strong, young arms helped him to his feet.

IV

He abandoned himself to the monotony of passionate ease. Life had hurt him with too brutal a roughness for an immediate recovery. Even the question of the money hardly presented itself as a difficulty. His purse, untouched, lay on Lucy's dressing-table, and he had taken it without a word, without a stir of emotion, though with a dim intellectual recognition of the action's quality. It was Lucy's good sense that had pointed out that he must communicate with Mrs. Price. Hence, he had written that lady a curt note, and enclosed two weeks' board in advance. It was this payment that puzzled Lucy.

"Why should you pay that woman, when you're living here?"

But on this point he was firm.

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"Don't let's talk about it; it's got to be done."

She came and sat on his knees. The light silk gown which she always wore in the house clung shapingly to her limbs that pressed themselves with so sinuous a grace against him. But the night had wearied him, and he looked calmly into her unshadowed eyes. With her free hand she took chocolate bon-bons from a box that lay on another chair, and inserted them daintily, one by one, between her white, even teeth. Her senses were all satisfied, and she was happy. The light struck a greenish tinge from her eyes, and with a gesture of rich indolence she nestled down on his shoulder.

For almost the first time in many days the thought of the future—his future and hers—came to him with a tragic forcefulness. What would become of her when her store of money was gone? As for himself, he had abandoned his studies, his hopes, his ambitions. What account would he give of himself to his father, what to his own soul? Was he not now responsible for Lucy? Had she not trusted herself

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to him wholly and been faithful to him? The satiety of his senses gave him an hour of clear insight. He saw himself ruined, shamed, destroyed. Should he marry Lucy and slink away from his own world and his own life? Should he continue this illicit relation that sapped his intellect and tyrannised his nerves? He must go. Pity and gratitude and passion must alike be crushed. There was no other way.

He laid his soft and sleeping burden on the bed and went out. He was glad now, above all things, that he had kept his room at Mrs. Price's, for it seemed suddenly a refuge where he could, at least, be alone and think. Its bareness, when he reached it, seemed a strengthening influence now—the narrow, wooden bed a place of cool rest and liquid sleep. It was almost with disgust that he thought of Lucy, and of the faint and sweet odour of musk that surrounded her. To his young ignorance of the world and of himself the battle seemed already fought.

On the stairs he met Doyle, who accosted him cordially.

"Hello, I haven't seen you around much, recently."

"I've been away," Herbert answered, hesitatingly.

"Oh, you have? Well, would you mind coming to my room for a while?"

Herbert wondered at Doyle's peremptory tone. But he followed the older man.

When they were seated, Doyle lit a cigar and puffed at it nervously.

"Look here," he burst out, at last, "I'm about twice your age, and I introduced you to Lucy Treat. So, suppose you listen to me for two minutes without getting mad."

Herbert felt subtly antagonised, but he prepared himself to be patient.

"Well?"

Doyle noticed the reserve and tentativeness of the word. He put his large, red-spotted hand on Herbert's shoulder.

"You've been living with that woman!"

"Suppose I have?"

The older man smiled.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

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The echo of his own thought dismayed Herbert.

"Do? What do you mean?"

Doyle drew himself up. His eyes flamed, a sudden energy seemed to diffuse itself through his gross frame.

"I mean that if you want to go to hell like me—here's your chance." Then, as swiftly, the man seemed to collapse and dropped heavily into a chair. He bent forward and took his head between his hands. Then he spoke like one mechanically rehearsing a story that was too familiar for any emphasis.

"Lord, I did the same as you. And then I had fine notions of moral responsibility, and I married the girl. Nobody I'd ever known would look at me. And right too. It was prejudice, maybe, but it was a healthy prejudice. Look at me if you want to know how healthy it was. The woman's life, her point of view—that got into my blood. That's it, Vincent, you don't rise; you sink. I can't look at a decent woman decently; I can't live without whiskey. All life

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gets down to one thing—one thing that dirties all others, makes 'em foul. . . ."

"But now!" Herbert ventured.

"Oh, you mean that she's gone? Yes, and with another man. But she stayed too long. And though I know what she is, I'm jealous night and day; and if she came back to-morrow I'd fall into the grip of the same old vice and just—drink a little harder."

The man's sincerity and grief were not to be resisted.

"And what is one to do?"

"Chuck the creature into the streets! Run away as far as you can get. You didn't make her—God did that! But don't let her make the same of you. She's in the world to exercise one bodily function. Did you ever see any other instinct?"

"She has been kind to me."

"Aren't you the instrument she's got to have? Is there any appeal of mind or soul to which she's open?"

Herbert did not answer. He had tried to interest Lucy in the simplest books, and had a

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“Yes, the Earles have moved into a flat on Manhattan Avenue. They have the dearest place. They’ve got the loveliest furniture. Everything very expensive.”

“And you,” he asked, “did you move to the Bronx?”

She shuddered, a little consciously, he thought.

“Yes, we have a house on Clay Avenue. One of a row, all alike. It’s hideous.”

He didn’t know in what form to acknowledge the sigh with which she ended her speech. It seemed to him that she was encouraging a more intimate attitude on his side than he had yet taken. But he was timid.

“Have you rented any rooms yet?” He asked the commonplace question in an eager voice.

They looked at each other, and taken aback by the strange intimacy of the gaze, lowered their eyes quickly.

“I rented one,” she said, with a forced laugh, “and that only for a time.”

A gentle pity for her came over him. She

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seemed so unhappy, so friendless even. The part of a landlady renting out rooms seemed hardly to fit her. She seemed made for love and ease rather than for material hardships. He watched her small, gloved hand gather a strand of light hair that the wind had blown across her face. Then he heard her voice, low, velvety and, to him, seductive.

“Didn’t you once think of taking a room?”

He answered eagerly.

“Yes, I did. I should be happy if you could let me have one. I’m anxious to get away from this neighbourhood.”

“Don’t you like it?” she asked.

“No longer,” he returned, feeling suddenly a need to tell her of his affair with Lucy and its problems.

They walked along slowly, Herbert wrestling with his desire to speak. A grey film of cloud crept, almost imperceptibly, over the river and the sky. Behind it the rayless sun shone like a shield of brass, afire with sullen light. A wind of early winter, touched with the perished passions of man and nature, shook, in fitful

gusts, the bare tops of the trees. Kate Bathurst and Herbert stopped and leaned over the parapet, full of copper-coloured foliage, and he looked earnestly across the river at the gaunt and sterile fronts of the Palisades. He was not conscious of the restless, liquid glance upon him. The need for self-revelation still possessed him. It seemed to him in his inexperience and under the influence of the scene, that he had been in the grip of a unique and tragical experience and that he should find a strange consolation in communicating that experience to the woman beside him. But he did not know how to begin. He laid his hand on hers, for his relation with Lucy had, unconsciously, given him a sense of the accessibility of all women to sexual or semi-sexual impressions. Then he asked:

“What are you thinking of?”

“Oh,” she sighed, “all kinds of things.”

“Happy things?” he asked.

She shook her head, but said nothing. They walked slowly back in the direction of the subway station. There she let her hand lie in his.

“I will hear from you, then?”

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“Certainly. Soon.”

He took his way through the deserted campus. Hemmed in by the tall buildings of the University, the dusk seemed to float and eddy there like the mauve waters of an airy lake. From step and turret shone the hard, white radiance of the electric lamps. A great loneliness fell upon him and unappeased yearnings that he attributed to the promptings of his heart. But the very weariness of his senses carried with it a more ardent sting. He thought alternately of Lucy’s flexible body and of the moist look in Kate Bathurst’s blue eyes. . . .

A sudden meeting with Doyle on the stairs at Mrs. Price’s served to recall to him the fear and shame of the morning. Dinner over, he went to his room with an aching sense of loss and desolation. His case was that of one accustomed to the use of a strong narcotic, a drug that lays asleep all faculties save one. Deprived of it, all the other elements of his life beleaguered his soul with a cruel persistence. The affections and ambitions for which he had once lived, seemed now to turn upon him white

faces of reproach and fear. And he was utterly powerless before them; he knew but could not feel either their attractiveness or their claims. A terrible force drew him out into the night, but he did not yield. It seemed to him a crucial moment of his fate; if he lost here, then he was lost in truth. He fought his battle in the grey hours of the night, and, though he was not driven forth, he did not wholly win.

For the next few days he attended his duties at the University with a mechanical regularity. But there the quite uninspired droning of thrice-digested knowledge went ruthlessly on, and teaching and learning were equally devoid of any spiritual or mental energy. . . . He even went to a meeting of a literary club connected with the department, and found, on that pale scene, no interchange of ideas, but a conventional babbling together with much flattery of the reigning professors. One of these—a colourless product of a colourless system—turned to him with a kindly smile.

“The University seems not to have had any formative influence on you yet, Mr. Vincent.”

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Herbert was silent. Perhaps he was at fault. But he would not openly assert that the University had given his soul the bread of life instead of the proverbial stone. . . .

At the house, Doyle watched him with a tired curiosity; Mrs. Price with a hard, ironic eye. He felt himself clamped in an impossible situation, and yet the strength to break through it was lacking. A corroding jealousy of Lucy stayed with him night and day, and his heart quailed at the thought of her possible adventures. He hated her for her silent power over him, and sat, evening after evening, consumed by the torture of his imaginings. An absolute escape was not to be thought of since he had paid his tuition fees at the University, and must continue his studies there. Once or twice of an evening Doyle came into his room, his eyes bloodshot and his hands trembling. A huge moroseness seemed to have settled on the man, who sat now, habitually, bent forward and supporting his head.

“You might as well go to the woman and be damned now, as any other time.”

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"You've changed your point of view," Herbert said.

"Have I? Well, you know my wife, my wife"—he laughed almost hysterically—"is in town with that damned . . . with whom she's living. I met her, and she passed me on the street like a dog."

Herbert felt himself grow pale. It was easy enough to imagine Lucy doing just that—doing it with her eyes still unmoved, still unshadowed. He got up.

"I'll keep out of it."

Doyle drew his hand over his mouth with the gesture of the habitual drinker.

"Will you? All right. We'll see. . . ."

The weather increased in severity and the first snows of winter began to fall. In Herbert's room, which, in a house warmed by a furnace, had no heat at all, the temperature was almost unbearable. When dark came, the single gas-jet gave out a little warmth. But during the day Herbert's breath hung before him, cloudlike, in the icy air. . . . This physical hardship, together with the tastelessness and insufficiency



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ing-feet and with trailing suspenders, came toward him.

“What in hell do you mean by coming in that way?”

In Herbert's brain words reeled themselves off mechanically: “She has moved . . . she has moved . . .” Then he looked toward the bed and saw Lucy's bare arms and shoulder rising from the pillow; he saw her dark, unshadowed eyes and scarlet lips. . . . As he walked slowly and falteringly down the steps, he heard a hoarse voice:

“By God, I believe that was some guy of yours, Lou!”

Then a door slammed.

Drenched with the streaming rain, Herbert, late that night, came into his room. In his great desolateness, in his bitter humiliation, he tried to summon the ghosts of all nobler thoughts and images that had once been so potent in his heart —and tried in vain.

V

On his return to New York, Herbert Vincent stopped at a small hotel in Harlem where he could get a room at a low price. It was, of course, impossible to stay here, but in the hours of somewhat dispassionate reflection which his journey had made possible, he had come to believe that the wretchedness of his surroundings at Mrs. Price's had given a treble power to the temptations from without. He had come to several other conclusions during his absence of three weeks: one, that for the present, at least, it would be futile for him to try to continue his studies; another, that all strength for the life before him must now come from within.

Shaken to the depth of his being by the degradation summed up in the lurid horror of that final scene into which his affair with Lucy Treat had plunged him, he had tried to lean

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heavily upon the moral props that offered themselves at home. It had there been tacitly recognised that he had probably had some "experience" in New York. An evangelistic fervour had thrilled the family minister's voice as he had prayed pointedly for him who was dead, but is now alive; who was lost, but is now found. He had been treated like a patient on the eve of recovery, and his father had supplicated for a rich outpouring of the Divine Spirit, and a softening of the stubborn heart. In a word, instead of moral encouragement or spiritual comfort, he had been asked to assent, emotionally, to dogmatic propositions and historical facts, both of which his intellect had rejected long ago and for ever. Inevitably he had been thrown back upon himself with the added bitterness of the conviction that there was no external help to be found.

Once more he faced the city, that terrible Enchantress who now looked drab and tawdry enough in the thaw following a heavy fall of snow. Before setting out to get work it was necessary first of all to find a home, and he re-

membered with pleasure the blue eyes that had looked into his so caressingly that autumnal afternoon on Riverside Drive. He had the slightest possible notion as to where Clay Avenue was, but its distance from all his recent haunts made it seem inviting. He wanted to flee from every place, from every circumstance that might remind him of Lucy, who was to him an unforgettable figure, since she represented his first contact with the central passion of life.

It took him some time to find Mrs. Bathurst's exact address among his papers, and more time to get intelligible information concerning the whereabouts of her dwelling. Since it seemed even farther than he had supposed, he determined to put off his going until the morrow. He went downstairs in order to get some dinner, and passed on the way several women with bleached hair and pencilled eyes who looked at him boldly. It occurred to him then that he had heard queer stories of the smaller New York hotels. The women stopped in a group at the head of the stairs; he could feel their

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hard glances on his back, and it seemed to him suddenly as if the whole city, wherever he might turn, was but a huge market-place where one might purchase the satisfaction of all baser desires. Unwittingly, he went to the West End Casino to dine, and once more found himself surrounded by the dead, strawy hair, the large, blank eyes, the clamourous clothes and jewels of the poor "daughters of joy." He left his meal half-finished. An almost physical nausea seized him and he hastened to the Saint Elmo hotel to sleep.

But sleep did not come to him for hours. Through the thin partition floated the sounds of riot; the din of pleasure without joy, lust without even hatred, and drunkenness without abandon; the mechanical revel to which the Enchantress nightly forces her slaves. He knew the quality of all he heard, but his senses had not been numbed; he was too young not to be moved. He threw open the window and let the cold air fill the room. . . .

He had no difficulty the next day in finding Clay Avenue. It ran through a neighbourhood

of muddy roads and rough board-fences covered with the gaudy hideousness of advertisements. Before him lay a railroad embankment through which slow freight-trains wheezed wearily, and to the right lay the row of houses that he sought. These were two-story structures of literally box-like shape, which, with no space between them, seemed to lean drearily against each other. Originally of some, no doubt, garish shade, their colour had now faded to an indeterminate brown. Each had a little piazza in front and a bit of soggy garden usually filled with empty tins and shards of heavy pottery. What rendered this scene the more remarkable was that it represented not a refuge of the hopelessly poor, but that men and women possessing a decent competence had voluntarily chosen this as their home. Herbert was not unaware of the significance of what he saw, though it was rather through his taste than by any ordered reasoning that he contemned a civilisation which, in the worship of coarse material success, had rendered men impervious to ugliness and squalour.

He rang at the door of Mrs. Bathurst's house that stood in the middle of the block, and was admitted by a small, peaked maid-servant, bony and yellow of skin, but wearing a neat, white cap. She conducted him into the parlour, a small, unfriendly room, with an oak mantelpiece of rough workmanship and faded green wall-paper. A few upholstered chairs, a couch with odd, embroidered cushions, and a small upright piano, furnished the room. At the far end, on a hanging shelf, lay a number of volumes of the "Seaside Library," unmistakable in their grey and blue covers. At the end of ten slow minutes, Mrs. Bathurst appeared.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Vincent? I was afraid you'd left New York for good."

He watched with pleasure the soft pink of her cheeks and the vivacious brightness of her eyes. They seemed for a moment to have lost the vague unrest which he had seen in them.

"I only went home for a little while," he said, "and now I've come for the room which you once promised me. Is it still to be had?"

She nodded, tilting her chin.

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"I should say so. I haven't been able to get another lodger. Who wants to live here?"

"It is a little far," he admitted.

"Far! It's horrible, horrible! You can't even go to a matinée."

He smiled.

"I care very little for that. All I want is a quiet room for which I won't have to pay very much."

She got up.

"I'll show you what I have."

She led the way up the stairs and let him glance into the large front-room occupied by herself and her husband. It gave him a strange feeling to see the room with its large bed, but she led him hurriedly on.

"Behind this," she said, with a pretty mock business-like gesture, "is another room, almost as big. It's very nicely furnished, and you can have it at three dollars a week."

She showed it to him, and it proved to be spacious and comfortable. He thought that he could work here and rest here. He followed her about as she showed him the advantages of the

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room—the large closet, the writing-table, the two arm-chairs. Then she turned to him for his approval. The proper words did not come to him at once and they stood, looking at each other, in the silence of the house. Both were embarrassed, keenly feeling each other's presence and the fact that they were alone. He could not imagine why the freedom of their relation should be so suddenly disturbed or why a warm flush of colour should come upon her face and neck. Abruptly he broke the silence:

“May I move in at once?”

She sighed.

“Certainly; and if you want meals here, I can give you those, too.”

“That will be delightful,” he said, with assumed cheerfulness.

As a matter of fact, a strange gloom mastered them both. It was increased as they went to the door together and saw the dreary landscape spread out before them. He saw from the way she looked about her that the scene—in its poverty, its distance from the elegance and

wealth of the lower city—gave her a profound dissatisfaction.

“Does Mr. Bathurst like this neighbourhood?” he asked.

She turned to him quickly.

“Mr. Bathurst! Oh, he doesn’t see much of it. He leaves home at seven in the morning, and doesn’t get back till six or seven at night. He’s foreman of the composing-room at Ridgeley and Company’s.”

She spoke the last words rapidly as if making a disagreeable confession. Their utterance seemed also to recall to her other considerations.

“So you will move in on Monday?”

He was taken aback.

“I thought you said I might come at once?”

“Did I?” she laughed. “Well, I think Mr. Bathurst would prefer to have it from Monday to Monday. He’s very particular. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Oh, no.”

He lingered a moment more beside her on the piazza, but there seemed nothing more for him

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to do or say. Yet she seemed subtly disappointed when he said good-by, and stood gazing after him until he was out of her sight.

He hardly knew how to pass his time during the two days that would elapse until Monday. It had seemed too, that once definitely settled, he would be able to take up his worldly affairs with a calmer energy. Now his plans were broken and he felt extremely annoyed over what was, after all, but a petty accident.

But he used the morning of the intervening day to go downtown to deliver certain letters of introduction and commendation that he had received. During the previous months of his residence in New York he had rarely gone into the business district, and he felt now, as he stepped from the Wall Street subway station, as if he had all at once fallen upon a new and chaotic world. A world not without its grandeur, certainly. He looked down the grave shaft of Wall Street, shadowed by towering structures, and thought, despite the Greek portico of the Sub-treasury, neither of Rome, nor of Athens, nor yet of Egypt, but of those sombre

piles—huge, massive, unheroic—in which Assyria invoked her immemorial gods. But the human beings that surged here seemed to him utterly strange. He had expected to see upon their faces both eagerness and energy. On the contrary, he found the majority of them almost lifeless masks. The limbs moved busily, but the spirit seemed to be treading a mere mechanical round. An Italian boy, selling cheap sweet-meats on the kerb, struck him as the only truly human being in this vast stream. Over the lad's mobile countenance thoughts and impressions seemed to pass like shadows. Herbert stopped to buy a bar of chocolate; the black eyes flickered with pleasure. Heartened by this gleam he set out to find the office of the great newspaper to whose editor he had been directed.

The office was in one of the older buildings, tall and gloomy, and lacking the air of calm, bright cruelty which characterises the modern sky-scraper. A somewhat old-fashioned elevator took him to the ninth story. Here, in a dingy hall, men and boys were hurrying about with a fevered energy of movement. One or

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two boys would occasionally dawdle for a moment on a bench, only to shoot forward again at the tinkle of a bell within. It was clear enough that this place was meant as a reception-room for visitors, for a table covered with magazines and flanked by a few chairs stood at one end. And yet no one in all this hastening crowd showed the slightest consciousness of Herbert's presence. In his pride and sensitiveness he would have left the building, his errand unperformed, had not one of the brisker-looking of the boys run into him.

“D'you want to see somebody?”

“Mr. Sherman——”

“He's out to lunch.”

“No, he ain't,” cried another of the youngsters. “What's your business?”

Herbert handed the lad his card and the introductory letter which he carried. Then he sat down again and waited. The hands of a large dusty clock that hung on the wall beside him told him of the slow passage of the minutes. He would gladly have escaped. There seemed to him in the whole proceeding something of

unnecessary insult and degradation. All but twenty minutes passed before he was summoned into the inner office, and he was acutely conscious of the fact that the courtesy with which he had been treated and his long wait had robbed him of that self-confidence of mind and of bearing which would have helped him to make a juster impression upon the great man.

The latter sat in a tiny office filled almost wholly by a roller-top desk. He motioned Herbert to a single chair that stood in the room. Nervously he fingered the letter.

"Very glad to know you, Mr. Vincent. We have no position vacant, but, of course, we're always open to special articles."

Herbert looked into a pair of keen, grey, tired eyes.

"Are there any specific requirements for these?" he asked.

"Oh, no. We take a good many kinds of things. Your best plan will be to look through the paper, especially on Sunday. We shall always be glad to consider your work."

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Jerkily he stretched out a thin, long hand, touched Herbert's and turned away.

The street was an immense relief to Herbert. Here he felt free and healthily alone. A cold wind blew inland from the Battery, and he was glad of the conflict with it that the mere act of walking entailed. He knew, once and for all, that the waiting at the gate of strangers—with however praiseworthy a purpose—was not for him; that he could never ask and importune and impress men (as he had been told he should do) with the sense of his existence and his powers. The trip to Harlem seemed like a journey homeward. He did not return at once to the hotel, but walked on toward the river. The day was grey now, a heavy fog hid the Palisades and the ships; the street-lamps that began to burst forth here and there looked, with their poles invisible, like great, round stars hanging strangely in a murky heaven. There was a wintry quiet in the scene that calmed Herbert's nerves, that brought him a feeling of resignation, deep and unwonted. He did not know what would become of him; he desired not to

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disappoint those who had set their hopes upon him; he divined that an irresistible adventure still awaited him at the hands of the Enchantress who had gripped his life. And yet he felt serene at this hour, conscious of that eternal river of events in which he was as a floating leaf, whose strong current masters us all, whose direction we must needs believe the direction of the **Everlasting Will**.

PART TWO

VI

On Friday afternoon, when Herbert had left her, Kate Bathurst turned back into the empty house. She heard a faint scratching in the basement where the maid was at work, but save for that, all was silent. She, too, should have gone into the kitchen to prepare the dinner, but her many worries kept her inactive. The bit of good fortune which the renting of a room to Herbert meant would, in reality, serve but to increase the perplexities which her husband's attitude brought upon her. She awaited his coming with anxiety; not because she feared him. The big, slow man was rarely violent in speech; never in action. But the conflict which she knew to be ahead of her would demonstrate once more, and crushingly, her own powerless-

ness. Andrew rarely argued, but he was like stone. For all the hopes and desires of her luxurious nature he had a grim contempt; concession of any kind was unknown to him, and he would insist that the rent which Herbert would pay be applied not to "foolishness," but to bettering their position in the world. Their position in the world! That was his favourite phrase, and it exasperated her more than any other. For Andrew wanted a house, a balance at the banker's, and an influential station in his union; she wanted clothes and pleasures and a flat in a semi-fashionable neighbourhood. He made money enough to give her all she wanted (this was her bitterest thought), and he hoarded it with a meanness that she had long come to blend with certain personal habits of his into an image that did the man but rude justice.

Angrily she went into the kitchen. For any open resistance to his demands, her character was too lacking in fierceness and stability. The sum of all her deviations up to this point had been made up of small deceptions regarding the expenditure of her household money.

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But her craving for pleasure, for show, for what she conceived of as distinction, was growing, and with the sentimental heroism of cheap fiction she dreamed of riches and tragedies and passions amid which Andrew always played the part of the defeated villain, while she was carried off by an indistinct figure in evening-clothes and a silk hat through an odour of roses and under the glitter of the lights of Broadway.

In the meantime she basted the leg of mutton in the oven, and looked after the turnips boiling on the stove. They sent forth a harsh, crude odour which exasperated her all the more. Andrew liked everything that struck her as common and hideous. She would have been content with a spoonful of cauliflower; he insisted on a mess of turnips. She prided herself on the distinction which, she thought, characterised all her tastes, and deplored her lot of being tied to a person of hopeless coarseness.

The time, however, passed swiftly enough, and she heard the unmistakable tread of Andrew on the porch. She had given up the practice of going out to meet him years ago;

he was sternly averse to any emotional display. Quietly she continued her work, and entered the dining-room only when it was time to lay the cloth.

Andrew sat in a rocking-chair by the window, smoking a clay pipe. He had taken off his coat and turned up the sleeves of his cheap negligee shirt, so that his red flannel underwear shone garishly. His head was almost square, his features not without intelligence, but impassive, moveless, wooden. The very cut of his blond, sparse moustache had in it something of the affected severity of the "honest workingman." He was reading *The Call*, and the fingers with which he grasped the paper were square, still blackened by the almost ineradicable printer's ink, and the short, dull broken nails seemed to betoken a measure of brutality. Kate looked at him with inner distaste.

"Hallo, Andrew!"

He looked up from his paper with an inarticulate sound.

"Dinner 'most ready!'"

"In a minute," she answered.

Then he returned to the reading of his paper and she to the kitchen. There a wretched catastrophe met her eyes. She had placed the turnips in a dish on the kitchen table; now the greater portion of them lay on the floor, and the awkward little servant was fearfully scratching the mess up from the floor. Kate stood quite still for a moment, ready to burst out. But a sense of repulsion to the kitchen, the maid and the food came over her. It wasn't worth while for a person of a finer nature to squabble over such things.

"*You are a fool!*" she said to the girl.

She proceeded to serve the turnips that had not touched the floor, in a smaller dish, and sent them into the dining-room. A few more trips completed the preparations, and presently she was sitting opposite Andrew at the table.

He carved the meat with a business-like air.

"I saw Friedman to-day."

She laid down her knife and fork. A feeling of despair came over her.

"Oh, you did"

"Yes. I think we can make a bargain. This

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house suits me all right, and he's willing to make terms."

Kate restrained herself with all the strength at her command. She stifled the impulse to weep, and cried out:

"And if you make monthly payments on the house, what are we going to live on? I haven't a rag to my back now!"

He put his broad hands down on the table.

"You got all the clothes a workingman's wife needs, and more too. I want to get something for the time when I'm old. There ain't going to be chick or child to help us along."

She grew red with anger and contempt.

"It isn't enough that I haven't a pleasure in the world. I suppose you'd want me to have a lot of children and work myself to the bone! Oh, Lord!"—she broke down weakly—"what's the use of living, anyhow?"

"You'd see the use quick enough, Kate, if you weren't a fool!"

She wept weakly.

"And you know," she went on, "you know I'm not strong enough to have a child."

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“You mean you don’t want to.” He got up heavily. “You don’t deceive me. I know the practices you’ve got up your sleeve. I don’t see that you’re good for anything in the world. But there ain’t any use in talking. From next month on, we’ll begin to pay installments on the house. You’ll manage to get clothes enough, all the same.”

In the rapidity with which the discussion had developed, Kate had strangely enough forgotten to tell Bathurst about the renting of the room.

Now she drew herself up and pouted. There was a time when she could bend Andrew from his purposes by these little devices.

“Will you promise me something, Andy?”

He looked at her coolly. For just a moment a slight relenting flickered in his eye, but it died out again.

“What is it?”

“I rented the back room upstairs.”

“To whom?”

“Mr. Vincent. He’s a student, and I met him at Clara Earle’s.”

"At *that* woman's? What's he going to pay?"

"Three dollars a week."

"It's little enough. I suppose you want that money."

She reached out toward him across the table, till her hand touched his.

"Don't I let you have a servant?" he asked, slowly. "Has any other workingman's wife got one?"

She clasped his hand tightly.

"Can't you spare me that much?" she pleaded. He cleared his throat.

"All right, Kit, you can have—half."

She withdrew her hand swiftly. Her wiles had failed. Had anyone ever seen such meanness? She left the table abruptly and called the maid to clear it, though she knew that he hated the girl's presence. Then she went into the parlour, lit the gas and picked up one of her favourite volumes.

It was more difficult than usual for her to become immersed in her book. But to her reading partook, in no measure, of the nature of a

literary exercise; it was a narcotic, pure and simple. The book that she was reading was a little paper-bound one, covered in white with slim gold lines. The name of it was "The Squire's Darling," and Kate thought it one of the most charming narratives that she had ever read. It carried her as far as possible from Clay Avenue, from the maid, the kitchen and from Andrew, carried her into a sort of faery England peopled by the Lillians and Isabels and Eleanors of Tennyson's earlier and more saccharine poems, into a land of wide lawns and mournful parks with white statuary gleaming from the thickets; a land where lovers, diaphanous of body and filled with the pseudo-tragedy of impossible griefs, shed delicious tears in the willow-shadowed waters of melancholy lakes. The whole fabric was false, sweetishly sentimental, utterly rotten from any sane moral standpoint. But to Kate it represented a real world, a world of whose existence she had no doubt at all, and in which, she felt sure, she could have borne herself with all the sweet,

grave heroism, with all the rapturous abandon to noble grief of her favourite characters.

In this sort of reading Kate, like so many of her kind, had indulged for many years. She had begun in her childhood, snatching a few minutes here and there from the work in her mother's dressmaking establishment. It was this reading that had clothed the sudden passionate impulse of Andrew for her young but over-developed body with all the glamour of tinsel romance; it had made her married life seem wholly sordid and wretched. A great flood of hope had irradiated her heart when, some years before, Andrew had come from the small Massachusetts town that had been their common home, and had joined the force of a New York composing-room. In the great city she had hoped to find all that her soul dreamed of. Its Sunday papers had been her weekly stimulant; the names of its social set were intimately known to her. And then the city had turned out to be, as far as she was concerned, not a place of pleasure, but merely a continuation of the old plainness and evenness of life. She was

now entering the early years of a rich-blooded maturity; Andrew's ardour had cooled very long ago, and hence she clung more passionately than ever to the pinchbeck glitter of her day-dreams. . . .

Punctually at ten o'clock, Andrew got up.

"When is this fellow going to move in?"

"Monday," she said, resenting the interruption.

He stretched out his arms and yawned noisily.

"Say, we better go to bed. I've got to get up extra early in the morning. I want to see Friedman for a minute, if I can catch him."

She put down her book, for Andrew ruthlessly turned out the gas. She followed him upstairs wearily. She was really not at all tired, and would have preferred reading on and on, romantically, into the small hours of the night. But it was useless to invite the inevitable quarrel concerning the consumption of gas for "foolishness" that would follow any attempt on her part to stay up. It was a comforting reflection, after all, that Andrew was away from morning until night, and that during those

long hours she could live wholly for her dreams. . . .

Early next morning she was awakened by the violent trill of the alarm-clock. Andrew was already out of bed. He seemed to her horribly removed from all human infirmity. The clock rang and he jumped up, while she felt a physical nausea if she had not at least a few minutes in which to recover from the drowsiness of sleep.

"Come on, Kate," he said, dashing his face with cold water, "I've got to have my breakfast pretty quick."

She got up and threw a dressing-gown over her shoulders. She saw his look of disapproval at her failure to wash and comb her hair, but she was used to it by this time. She would simply run downstairs, get his meal, and then return to bed, whether the maid would bring her coffee and toast. Andrew, she knew, disapproved thoroughly of this habit. He thought that a man's wife ought to sit, clean and prepared for the day, at the breakfast table. But she had the courage of her cowardice; on this one point she would not yield.

To-day, when Bathurst was gone, she remained in bed even longer than usual. When he returned in the afternoon with his week's wages she would have to go out and make the purchases that the household required. It was another annoyance for which she desired to gather strength. She knew that Andrew had a bank account, and she did not see why she could not order her meats and groceries and pay for them by cheque at the end of the month. But he insisted that such a process led to waste and to the buying of useless luxuries. Moreover, it did not accord with his violently anti-capitalistic conception of the proper manners of his class. That, again, was a part of his life in which she did not enter at all, which, in truth, filled her with a certain horror and contempt. All the beautiful faery world the existence of which was her only solace, even though she might never enter its gates—all that he would destroy. His attitude on religion rasped her no less. Personally she felt no need of it, but in some way which she had not mind enough to analyse it seemed to her another bulwark of all the

beauty and elegance that she admired, and she winced at his mechanical radicalism.

At eleven o'clock she got up and took a warm bath. Then she returned to her room and sadly turned over her few, plain gowns. Not one reached her ideal of what a gown should be. Her linen and corsets, too, were of the plainest. She had no ribbons, no perfumes, no exquisite soaps, none of those hundred coquettish nothings which mean so much in the toilet. She sighed as she put on her simple garments and thought enviously of the luxuries of Clara Earle's dressing-table.

She awaited Andrew's coming listlessly. There was a time when she had taken pleasure in the household purchases, but their complete monotony had deadened that, too. The groceries, the meats, the vegetables—it was the same, week in, week out. By buying a little less of everything she usually kept a dollar or two for her own uses. But recently these sums, and the simple dissipations they could buy, had seemed to her more and more paltry. There was really no pleasure left her in life.

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Andrew came in a few hours earlier than usual, with a look of quiet satisfaction on his face.

"Well," he said, "the house is as good as ours, if I keep my health."

"Oh, I guess you'll be all right," she answered, vaguely.

"Yes, I guess I will. Now we've got to cut down expenses a little bit. You can look after that."

She turned to him with an amazed look.

"Cut down expenses! On what!"

"Well, on coffee, I suppose, and sugar, and butter, and the things that ain't so necessary."

She burst out for once.

"But they're necessary for me, much more than your nasty turnips and cabbages."

He assumed a didactic air and tone.

"Good, wholesome food is all we need. The fancy things don't keep you in health. Anyhow, I'm going to give you two dollars less after this, on Saturday."

The quick tears came into her eyes.

"Then you can buy your own things!"

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"I guess you're glad to get a chance to get rid of the trouble. You don't want to do a thing but lazy around."

He turned to go, but she had not expected to be taken at her word. She was dressed now, and the box of chocolates which, at least, she could squeeze out of the household money, seemed to her suddenly alluring enough.

"I'll go," she said, sullenly. "But we won't be able to get along. I just want to show you that it's not laziness."

He dived into his pocket and handed her the greenbacks. Then he lit a pipe, put on a heavy, old coat, and went out into the yard to potter at a chicken-house that he was building against the coming of the spring.

Kate walked over to Third Avenue, where all provisions were a little cheaper than in her own neighbourhood. All that she detested there was the jostling, common crowd from which, especially in humid or rainy weather, an acrid odour of soaked, soiled clothing arose noisomely. But to-day the air was dry and the crowd less disagreeable. It took her a long

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time, however, to make her purchases, since all the shops were crowded, and she was difficult to satisfy. The butcher was rude to her because she criticised the meat, and she felt a dull revolt at having to come in contact with these coarse and common people.

When at last she had bought everything needful, she had only eighty-five cents left, a pitiful sum compared to the amounts that she was accustomed to have. She hardly knew what to do with it, and yet she felt that she must have some pleasure. Walking along, she came to a bright booth with gay posters before the door. It was a moving-picture show, and she drifted in with a stream of other poor pleasure-seekers. She had visited these shows only once or twice before, thinking them cheap and unrefined. Tonight the shadowy verisimilitude of the life-like phantoms gave her pleasure, but she cared even more for a few songs that were sung by a young man in a quavering, throaty tenor voice. These songs dealt in a richly sentimental way with love as it is understood by the childlike, romantic common people, and were

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illustrated by pictures always showing two lovers amid the loveliness of ideal landscapes. Kate thought that she could have listened to these songs, could have looked at these pictures for ever. They gave her an exquisite sensation; they roused in her a beautiful self-pity. All the world was full of love, and the adorable sorrows and sacrifices of love. As for her, she had a husband who wanted to save pennies on the consumption of sugar.

VII

THE dragging monotony of Sunday was broken for Kate in the afternoon, by an unexpected incursion of Clara Earle. That lady was beautifully attired. Her whole appearance had that compact and clean-cut neatness which characterises the well-dressed New Yorker. She kissed Kate effusively, while Andrew, with a grave nod in her direction, withdrew with his book into the dining-room. The two women smiled at each other when the door closed behind them.

“I just *had* to come somewhere this afternoon,” Mrs. Earle said. “But I was afraid your Andy would stick to us.”

Some better element in Kate rather disliked Mrs. Earle’s tone in regard to Andrew. But her subtle snobbishness and admiration for the

older woman forced her to silence, even to assent.

"Oh, he won't bother us," she said. "He'd rather read."

"Well," Mrs. Earle went on, "it's perfectly awful at home. The doctor was out late last night and is sleeping all day, and a friend of mine who promised to call didn't show up."

"What friend?" Kate asked.

"Oh, a Mr. Castle. I met him at the horse-show, last November."

"You went to the horse-show?" Kate couldn't keep the wonder and envy out of her voice.

"Oh, yes. It was just grand. You've got to go somewhere. Last week Mr. Castle took me to the opera. He's a great swell."

"He seems to be," Kate said, not without malice. "And what does the doctor say to him?"

"Oh, he gets huffy once in a while. But then he takes Fred's cigars. He'll never kick at anything. And he's got no right. He knew

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when he married me that I wanted things decent.”

Kate didn’t know what to say, but she admired highly such verve and strength and audacity. She leaned over and put her hand on her friend’s knee.

“That’s a lovely suit you’ve got.”

Mrs. Earle’s face assumed an expression of intense seriousness. The fulcrum upon which swings the dizzy round of mortal affairs had been reached.

“It’s simple, but—good. These patterns don’t go out of style, you see. And the make don’t, either. A plain tailor-made is as stylish next winter as this. I got it at Simpson, Crawford & Simpson’s.”

“How much did you pay for it?”

“Forty-seven-fifty,” Mrs. Earle answered, in a tone of extreme self-satisfaction. “It was reduced from sixty.”

“Well, it’s lovely, anyhow,” Kate said. “Get up and let me see you walk in it.”

Mrs. Earle got up and strode once or twice across the room.

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"Fits lovely, don't it?"

Kate assented with a sigh.

Mrs. Earle resumed her seat.

"I almost forgot to tell you the main thing. I'm going to give a little party on Thursday night. Mr. Castle is coming. And I want you and Andrew to be there. Will you come?"

Kate shrugged her shoulders.

"I've got nothing to put on."

"That's all right. I'll lend you one of my evening-dresses. But I'd like to have you."

"It's awfully good of you, Clara," Kate said, with genuine feeling, "but Andrew won't go."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, let him stay. I only ask him out of politeness, anyhow. You're grown up. Can't you come alone? We'll have a fine time."

The prospect seemed infinitely alluring to Kate. To have on one of Mrs. Earle's evening-gowns would be a bitter but an intense joy.

"I'll try to come," she said.

Then she hesitated, hardly knowing why. She had not yet spoken to Mrs. Earle of the subject of her intensest preoccupation.

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"What is it, Kate?" the latter asked.

"Oh, I just wanted to tell you that Mr. Vincent was here the other day and rented the big bedroom upstairs."

Mrs. Earle laughed.

"Is that so? Why, that's fine. The room right next to yours, eh? Well, maybe you'll like it now that Andrew goes to work so early."

Kate blushed, but laughed, and a strange, gay trill sounded in that laughter.

"Aren't you ashamed to suggest such things?"

Mrs. Earle's face darkened. The shadow of a harsh line or two hovered upon the beautiful contour of her cheeks.

"Ashamed? No. I'm not ashamed. What I say is this: you've only got one life to live, and you're bound to enjoy yourself."

"But you ought to do right," Kate said weakly.

"I suppose you mean I ought to coddle a drunken sot, and go to prayer-meeting. Not much. But look here, if Andrew won't come,

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let Vincent escort you. Anyhow, tell him he's invited. That'll make it just nice."

She got up and put her arm around Kate.

"Good-by, dearie. You'll come, won't you?"

"Oh, yes," Kate answered; "I'll come."

When Mrs. Earle was gone, Andrew returned to the parlour and sunk, satisfied, into his accustomed chair. He smoked thoughtfully, and read a large, hard-looking book. Kate sat opposite him at the other window. She fell into a deep reverie as she watched the light steal gradually from the sky without. She thought of Clara Earle's words, and of the bold and dashing life she led. Where did she get the money for her beautiful gowns, and jewels, and her many pleasures? The obvious explanation which the name of Fred Castle conveyed was a little repugnant to Kate's more timid and conventional mind, nor could she imagine how Dr. Earle could be so completely eliminated as a factor in such a situation.

She continued her thoughts as she went out of the room to get the supper. She was unassisted to-night, the little maid having gone to

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visit her parents. A faint odour of the warm dinner still clung to the kitchen, and in preparing some toast, Kate burned her hand. She sat down in a dim corner, nursing the burn which seemed to her symbolical of her whole life. Clara Earle never touched a cooking-utensil. She and her husband usually took their meals at a restaurant. At home an excellent maid prepared the meals or a caterer sent them in. Kate lost herself in dreams of such a life; she almost forgot her hurt. Then she heard Andrew's voice at the top of the stairs:

“Anything the matter with you, Kate?”

“Oh, no,” she called back. “Supper will be ready in a minute.”

At the table she did not feel in a mood to ask Andrew whether he would take her to the Earles' party. He persisted in talking politics to her in a way that made her head swim. He spoke of tariff reduction, of government ownership of public utilities as the entering wedge of a socialistic régime, and other similar matters that seemed to her desperately uninteresting. The meal over, both he and she re-

turned to their books, and it was not until they were together in their bedroom that she spoke of the subject nearest her heart.

"Dr. and Mrs. Earle are going to give a party next Thursday night, Andrew. They've invited us."

He smiled grimly.

"Mighty good of them."

"Aren't you going?" she asked.

He pulled off the second shoe, threw it on the floor, and then turned to her.

"Why should I go? I'd rather stay home. I don't like those people. I doubt if they're decent. If you had proper self-respect you wouldn't go, either."

"Oh, no; of course not. I'd sit at home all the time and never see a soul. They're the only friends I've got, and I'm going."

He looked at her again, and thoughtfully.

"All right. You can go, for me. But you'll find out what that Earle woman is before ever you get through with her."

He undressed in silence and lay down with a grunt of comfort. Kate, lying on the extreme

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edge of her side of the bed, considered what would happen if Clara's gown did not fit well. But she decided to dismiss such reflections, and fell asleep with a pleasant sense that Herbert was coming on the morrow and that thus a new element would enter her life. . . .

She was awake early on Monday morning, and needed not Andrew's summons to arouse her. In fact, she desired rather to hide her eagerness from his eyes, and hence returned to bed after breakfast, as was her wont. Then, when she heard the front door shut behind him, she sprang up and began to dress. Her perplexity was even greater than on the day before. She put on her best gown, the blue one in which Herbert had met her on Riverside Drive, and waited feverishly. It was not that she expected anything definite to happen, or had any definite plans or hopes. But Vincent's coming would be a change in the round of daily life. She would at least see another face habitually. As the hours wore on, however, other and exacter images rose in her mind. She thought of sudden meetings on the stairs—so-

cidental and quite innocent, of course—of chance contacts of various kinds. And all this she believed would give a new and subtle flavour to the daily round of household duties.

At eleven o'clock Herbert's trunk came, and she superintended its removal to the room upstairs, with a pleasant sense of self-importance. From that time on she did not leave the window. It was too cold to go out on the porch. And the longer she watched, the intenser grew her sense of expectation, so that she felt a pallour come over her face when, at last, she saw Herbert swing open the gate of the little front garden.

He came swiftly up the steps, and rang at the door. She went herself to open it for him, and it seemed to her that he brought into the warm house not only the refreshing coldness of the outer world, but also a measure of its movement and its joy. He pressed her hand warmly.

"I am glad to have come, Mrs. Bathurst. It's an awful nuisance not to be settled."

She smiled a happy assent.

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“Come into the parlour, first,” she said, “and sit down a minute. Your trunk is upstairs.”

He took off his long overcoat and his hat, and followed her into the parlour. He sat down, and she admired him more than she had done on either of their previous meetings. He seemed finer to her and more extraordinary, here in her home environment, than amid fairer and stranger scenes. His dark hair curled charmingly, she thought. His skin was white, and of a fine texture; his eyes large and soft. It pleased her especially that he was clean-shaven, and that his full expressive mouth was visible. But he would linger only a moment.

“I’m quite tired out,” he said, smiling. “I’ve had to attend to so many unaccustomed things.”

She conducted him to his room. At the door he turned to her with a smile and then went in, shutting her out. She lingered on the landing with a strange sense of loneliness, and she knew that she would always feel it now. So long as there had been no one in the house but the maid and herself, she had never felt alone. Now, this

added presence and her exclusion from it produced in her a new emotion.

It was hard to tear herself away, and to go downstairs. Her duties were not very many, after all, and the little maid relieved her of the more difficult of them. Thus, she wandered about the house, incapable of formulating to herself the cause of her disquiet. Every now and then she would go to the downstairs landing and listen for some sound from Herbert's room. She had had a lodger once before, and had felt no such sensations. He had been a young printer of Andrew's acquaintance, shy and coarse by turns, and his existence had not seemed to touch hers at any point. But this slender, sensitive-looking youth was from another world, from the world, she believed, for which she yearned—a world of beauty and romance and joy.

It had been agreed that, for the present, at least, Herbert was to take his dinners at the house. Hence, when the meal was served and Andrew, in his shirt-sleeves, sat at the head of

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the table, she went to summon Herbert. He answered her knock at the door immediately.

“Will you come to dinner, Mr. Vincent?”

“Certainly.” He opened the door a little wider so that she could look in. “You see, I have been trying to make myself at home.”

They went downstairs, and she introduced the two men to each other. Andrew regarded the newcomer with a critical air.

“I hear you’re a student, Mr. Vincent.”

“I have been, and shall probably be again.”

Bathurst shook his head.

“I don’t much believe in book-learning,” he said, drily. “It don’t help the world.”

“Not except as it helps the individual, perhaps.”

Bathurst leaned forward.

“But does it help him? Can he *do* something with it that’ll help economic conditions?”

“Are those the only conditions that matter?”

“Sure. There ain’t any use trying to do anything else, till the people own the sources of wealth.”

Herbert was silent. The discussion seemed

to him at once crude and irrelevant. As for Kate, she almost hated her husband. Did he have to bring in his wretched fads? Couldn't he talk like a gentleman to a gentleman? She turned to Herbert with a smile.

"Mrs. Earle is going to give a party on Thursday night, and she asked me to invite you. Will you come?"

She saw his face grow thoughtful, and then light up again.

"Yes, I suppose I ought to take a little recreation. Will you and Mr. Bathurst be there?"

"I won't," Andrew said, heavily.

The surliness of his tone dampened Kate's mood. Little more was said during the meal, and immediately at its end, Herbert went back to his room.

Kate turned angrily to her husband.

"Can't you be polite, Andrew?"

"I was," he said, gravely. "But I think that young fellow a good deal of a fool. With all his book-learning, he don't seem to be able to argue about anything."

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"Why should he want to argue?" she asked, querulously.

Andrew, with the air of a man who has something better to do, did not answer, and Kate returned to one of her novels for the rest of the weary evening.

She awoke early next morning, and looked at Andrew lying at her side. He had thrown his arms above his head; his mouth was slightly open, and he snored. The breath stirred his moustache, and the stiff hairs rose and fell grotesquely. Kate sat up to get a better view of him. He struck her as intolerably coarse and she thought, by contrast, of the figure sleeping in the next room.

Soon Andrew awakened and got up. He was in a very quiet mood, speaking scarcely a word. He ate his breakfast hurriedly, and went out. Kate started back to her sleeping-room, but not swiftly as on other days. She went up the stairs very slowly, step by step. On the landing she stopped before Herbert's door, and it seemed to her as though she heard the quiet breathing of the sleeper within. Then she entered her own

room, leaving the door slightly ajar. She lay down on her bed; the house was silent, and, in that silence, she felt with a poignant intensity the presence of Herbert in the house. She pressed her hands to her breasts, shaken by a strange storm of desire. The man who was her husband had long ceased to mean anything to her body; he had defeated her dreams, which Herbert embodied; he had starved her life. She lost herself in a waking passionate dream, almost more terrible in its intensity than any reality could be. All moral restraints, weak enough at best, fell from her, and the adultery which she had already committed in her heart seemed to her, by the side of her married life, something romantic, noble and beautiful. She heard Herbert get up and, in the wildness of her passion, she was almost capable of going to him and throwing herself on his breast. But a knock sounded at her door and the maid came in, bringing coffee and toast.

VIII

ON Thursday morning, Kate put on a bold front.

“So you’re not coming to the party, to-day?”

Andrew contented himself with an unintelligible murmur.

“Then”—she nerved herself to the effort—“you’ll take your dinner out, won’t you?”

She knew that she was violating his deepest prejudices. That a married man should dine alone in a restaurant was an abhorrent conception to him. But he took it more lightly than she had feared.

“You seem to want to go pretty hard!”

“I don’t go out much,” she said.

“All right, then. I guess I can get along this once.”

She was glad that the day’s pleasure was not to be marred by any useless quarrelling with

Andrew. She accompanied him to the door, and waved to him as he disappeared down the street. Then she hurried back to await Herbert's coming down. She wanted to remind him of the evening's engagement before she herself went out. It had been agreed upon between her and Clara Earle that she was to come early in the afternoon, so that the momentous gown could be tried on, and if need be, altered.

Herbert came down early, prepared to go out. "I hope you haven't forgotten to-night," she said, with a strange thrill.

"Oh, no," he laughed. "I'll be there punctually."

She felt entirely consoled now, and her heart knew an unwonted brightness. She calculated exactly the time it would take her to reach her friend's apartment on Manhattan Avenue, and she was dressed and prepared to go, far ahead of time.

The trip downtown was a pure pleasure to her, and seemed only too short. Then she walked for a little while in the hard, bright winter weather before she entered the house in

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which Mrs. Earle lived. It dazzled her with its magnificence. A large hallway, supported by little columns, led to the elevator. The columns were draped in crimson velvet, and in the walls shone bright mirrors. The decoration was tawdry and hideous beyond belief, but to poor Kate it seemed the essence of subtle elegance. She rode up on the elevator and rang, almost nervously, at the door of the apartment.

Mrs. Earle herself answered the bell.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Kate," she cried. "I've been looking at the dress, and I think it will be just perfect. You want to try it on now, because Fred Castle dropped in, and we want some afternoon tea when everything's ready."

"Oh, is Mr. Castle here, already?" Kate asked, timidly.

"Sure. He came to apologise for last Sunday, and I'm treating him like a dog. That's good for him; come along."

They entered the sleeping-chamber which seemed to Kate, despite its smallness, quite adorable. The appointments had a measure of

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grace and even luxury, which impressed her. She saw a good many little objects of silver and ivory that she had not noticed before and assumed, instinctively, that they were Mr. Castle's gifts. Once more she wondered at Dr. Earle's easy acquiescence in all these details, but Clara left her no time for reflection.

"Come on, now, pull off that dress," she said, taking from the tall closet the evening-gown that Kate was to wear.

The latter was of lace over shimmering pale-green silk, sleeveless and cut deep at the neck. It struck Kate's essentially Philistine soul as immodest; but she rejoiced in the prospect of sharing for once in the splendid immodesty of the great world. Clara helped her unhook her dress, which fell down to her feet.

"My goodness!" Mrs. Earle cried, loosening Kate's petticoat. "Wherever did you get those corsets? You couldn't get a decent dress to set over them. It's all the style this year to have no hips. Let's see if you can't wear some of mine."

Deftly she loosened the corset-strings, took

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off the corsets, and left Kate standing in her chemise. She went to the closet, rummaging for another pair of corsets. Kate shivered. She wondered whether she would ever command such variety and magnificence. Then, suddenly she turned around, for the door was being pushed open. A dark, distinguished male head leaned in.

“What are you doing, Claire?”

Then the man drew back, seeing his mistake. Kate had grasped a garment with which to cover herself, while Clara, deep in the closet, had not observed the incident. A sudden tremour of shame and virtuous indignation came over Kate.

“So Mr. Castle can come into your bedroom, when you’re dressing?”

Clara leaned up.

“How so?”

“He stuck his head in here, just now.”

“Well, you haven’t died of it, have you? Yes, of course, he can come in.”

Kate looked studiously away, and the older woman went on:

"You're not such a fool as you try to make out, Kate. What did you suppose he hung around for—to look at me?"

Kate was silent, overwhelmed by the brutal fact. It aroused in her no moral repulsion. Whatever wavering principles she had once possessed, had long ago been swept away by the surges of her impossible desires. But Mrs. Earle's frankness shocked her. She felt as if it must have some frightful consequence, and her whole nature drew back, afraid.

Presently the corset was found, and fortunately fitted the lines of Kate's body well. The evening-dress was slipped over, and Kate surveyed herself in the tall mirror of the dressing-table. She was speechless. She had never imagined that she could present an appearance so elegant, so graceful, so alluring. Her neck and bosom were faultlessly white; the skin of silky texture. Her eyes glowed strangely with the perception of her own fresh charm. Mrs. Earle surveyed her seriously.

"You'll do, Kate. I don't know but what you'll do a little bit too well. Now get into your

other dress and come on. But keep on the corsets; it'll be less trouble later."

With a feeling of regret, Kate took off her new splendour and put on her own blue dress. Then they went into the parlour where Mr. Castle was waiting. Kate looked at him curiously. He was tall and thin with handsome, tired eyes and a humourous mouth. He was very dark, and his hair was thinning a trifle at the top. His movements, as he arose, were subtly graceful.

"I am so very glad to see you, at last," he said, betraying not the slightest consciousness of the scene in the bedroom.

Clara cut in harshly.

"Don't be so affected, Fred."

He smiled calmly, and looked appealingly at Kate.

"Do you see with what brutality I'm treated? My nicest manners are called affected."

He was a new type of man to Kate. His perfect self-possession, his ease and tired grace astonished her. She hardly knew what to say to so magnificent a personage. But she admired

him vastly. Thus, she thought, and not otherwise, must the exquisite St. Elmos of romance bear themselves; thus, under a bantering demeanour must they conceal the starry nights of their tragical fates.

The maid served tea, and Kate contented herself with listening to the conversation of the other two. She did not know whether to be shocked or to laugh, for Clara seemed to put in motion all the artillery of brutality and brutal frankness of which she was mistress. The talk descended to depths! Kate heard Clara use words that she thought impossible of utterance. Mr. Castle, leaning back with eyes half-closed, seemed to take a strange delight in drawing out Clara more and more. Suddenly he turned to Kate.

“You mustn’t take us too seriously. We are really quite innocent persons.”

For a moment she resented the speech like an affront. It meant, so palpably, despite its quite different wording—you are her friend, and hence you enjoy this. And the sting of it was that her unsatisfied heart and senses did enjoy

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the subtle depravities that she witnessed. But she was not accustomed to such an atmosphere, and she felt relieved when, after five, Castle left.

“Half-past six is the official hour, isn’t it?” he asked.

Clara nodded.

“Be punctual!”

When he had gone, with an elaborate bow to Kate, Clara, standing in the middle of the room, looked at her steadily.

“You understand that when Fred comes later, he comes for the—first time.”

Kate nodded helplessly.

The two women retired to dress. It was a long and, to Kate, unaccustomed operation. At least in this form; for, when she was about to slip on the evening-gown once more, Clara stopped her.

“You’re too pale, and your hair is ridiculous. I want you to look well to-night.”

She took down Kate’s hair with nimble fingers, waved and curled it. Then she inserted a huge “rat,” and drew the hair over it into a

crown-like effect. The task completed, she went over Kate's face, anointing it with cold cream, powdering it and then putting on little shadings of rouge. She dipped her finger into the rouge and touched the tips of Kate's ears, and even her nostrils. Then she drew back.

"You'll do."

Kate hurried with the rest of her toilet, for they had heard the bell ring and the sound of Herbert's voice addressing the maid.

"You can go in first," Clara said, "and entertain your—friend."

"I haven't friends of your kind." Kate flashed out.

But Mrs. Earle contented herself with the cool answer:

"You will have. The only trouble up to now was that you didn't have a chance."

She found Herbert in the parlour, walking up and down. He turned around slowly as he saw her come, and stood quite still. It seemed to her—she hoped intensely that it was not her imagination—that he turned a little pale at the

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sight of her in the evening-gown. He grasped her hand, but his eyes did not leave her face.

“Would you have recognised me?” she asked, with a happy little laugh.

“Never,” he asserted. “I never saw anything like it.”

An exquisite sense of sudden intimacy came over them, but they could not enjoy it. Again the bell rang, and, in a moment, Clara and Mr. Castle stepped together into the room. The two men looked at each other curiously. Then Castle came forward and, for the first time, spoke with genuine seriousness.

“You board with Mrs. Bathurst, don’t you, Mr. Vincent?”

Herbert assented.

“And you are a student?”

“Yes.”

“I’d like to talk to you, sometime,” Castle went on. “Not to-night. Let us enjoy ourselves: ‘Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,’—but sometime!”

They went into the dining-room, Castle with Clara, and Herbert with Kate. The room was

brilliantly lit by electric bulbs over the table. The glass and silver sparkled almost piercingly. There seemed to be a general bright silveriness of effect, that made for pleasure, for abandon, for riotousness. Deep in Kate's mind still lurked the wonder at Dr. Earle's complete elimination. She looked across the table at Clara, but that beautiful face was firm and unmoved.

A dinner had been provided by a caterer in which even Kate could discern the exercise of a more luxurious imagination than Mrs. Earle could possibly possess. And she saw that Mr. Castle arranged everything, gave all orders and quietly conducted the meal. The food was exquisite, but the wines were more especially varied and knowingly chosen. Castle drank with deliberate steadiness; Clara quickly and with little desperate motions of her glass. When she leaned back, the tilted crystal at her lips, Castle's eyes were fixed greedily on her bosom. Kate looked at Herbert, who sat next to her, and saw that the spirit of the scene was capturing him too, that his glances were freer,

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his eyes more liquid, and that he bent nearer to her. She drank glass after glass of the wine offered her, and gradually a thin, golden film passed over all things, and a strange and beautiful lightness of activity mastered her senses.

The conversation was light, chaffing, essentially meaningless, except for Castle's occasional sarcasms. But the mood of the four people rose in abandon, fed by physical well-being and exhilaration. Only Clara's face darkened now and then.

"Don't look at me that way!" she said to Castle.

"Could I look at anything beautiful with less appreciation?" he asked, blandly.

Clara tossed her head.

"Men are all beasts. They'd like you to have your dress cut lower still. In fact, they prefer you in the altogether."

Kate laughed boisterously; she hardly knew why. She had a confused vision of Castle bending over Clara. Then she felt Herbert's hot lips on her arm and bosom. . . .

A lock clicked, a door slammed. The four

people assumed more normal postures. A heavy tread sounded in the hall and Dr. Earle, tall, heavy, stupidly handsome, walked into the room. His eyes were bloodshot and fierce, but his voice thick and undecided.

“Hallo! What’s all this? Why in hell didn’t you tell me there’d be company, Clara?”

Clara got up. The wine had made her reckless.

“I took good care to tell you this morning. You’d know that if you weren’t drunk.”

He lurched heavily toward her.

“You lie, damn you, you lie! I’ll show you how to have a lot of men and women drinking in my house!”

He took up a heavy crystal salad-bowl, and threw it lumberingly to the floor.

“Damn you!” he said again, and clenched his fists.

“You drunken beast!” Clara cried, enraged. “Get out of this house. Nothing in it belongs to you, anyhow!”

Castle sprang up. He had himself well in hand.

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"Won't you let a friend say something, Doctor? I'm sure Mrs. Earle told you of the little party she hoped to give. At all events, don't spoil it. Sit down and have a drink."

Earle looked around in a dazed way. The liquor that he had in him was taking hold again.

"Hallo, are *you* there?"

Castle dexterously emptied a pint bottle of champagne into a large water-glass, and handed it to Earle. The latter took it greedily, and drained it. Then he dropped into a chair, bent his head and large tears trickled ridiculously down his nose.

"I haven' got a home . . . never had one . . . damn . . . don' even know wha'—hic—happens . . ."

Castle leaned across the table and, with a brilliant smile, held out his hand.

"You are mistaken, Doctor—profoundly. Your wife and your friends respect you and recognise your worth. It's all a mistake."

Earle took the extended hand. His face brightened maudlinly.

"I b'lieve you . . . always been frien's,

eh, Castle? Less have some booze, God damn it all! . . . Sit on my lap, Clara, I—hic—love you."

Clara sat down next to him and touched his arm. Her eyes were fixed with a strange, mad intensity, on Castle. More wine was brought in. They all drank and Castle went to the piano. He struck the first bars of a song; they all joined in, and Clara jumped on a chair, singing with a full glass in her hand. Dr. Earle drained glass after glass and fell, head forward, on the table. His stertorous snores resounded through the room. . . .

At one o'clock, Castle threw open a window and leaned out. He motioned to Herbert to come thither.

"I want that talk with you, Vincent, remember."

Herbert smiled blandly. The unaccustomed wine had mastered him.

"All right, old fellow. But we'll have to go now."

"Yes," the older man said, gravely, "I think

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you had better. Take that woman home decently."

Castle himself made no motion to go. But Clara was already dressing her friend, and in a few minutes—they did not remember by what occult process—Kate and Herbert found themselves together on the street. The wine ran madly in their veins, and Herbert put his arm around Kate's waist. Thus they went to the subway station. In the bright light of the vestibule they succeeded in behaving decorously, but in the empty car they sat hand in hand, pressed close together, their eyes melting into one another's. They seemed to cover the ground between the farther station and the house with inconceivable swiftness. They found the door open, and entered the dark hall. For a moment they stood quite still in the darkness. Then, by a sudden brutal impulse of passion, they leaned toward each other. Herbert's trembling hand tore the shoulder-straps from her gown, and his lips stung her shoulders, her breasts, her mouth. She sank on the stairs under the storm of his kisses; an infinite weakness came

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over her when, suddenly, they heard a stirring above. It was merely the heavy tossing of an unquiet sleeper on a creaking bed. But it recalled those two to a sense of fear and responsibility. Kate got up and ascended the stairs. Herbert followed her. On the upper landing he took her hand once more, but she wrenched it away, and slipped into the room where her husband slept and muttered in the grasp of evil dreams.

IX

WHEN Kate awoke, the warm sunshine streamed into her window and Andrew was gone. It was an unprecedented action on his part. She feared that he had smelt the wine on her breath, and had left her asleep in disgust. He was a man strikingly incapable of any excess, nor could he understand it in others. But Kate was too tired to think. She had a vague recollection of what had taken place the night before—a recollection that fevered her senses. In spite of an aching in her head and in her limbs, her whole being was concentrated, for the moment, upon one unsatisfied desire. The torch had been applied, and she was aflame; the restraints of habit (the only ones that held back the impulses of her unmoral nature) had been broken. She was capable of anything to

wreak her primordial passion upon the object of its desire. . . .

She got up and, without putting on any other garment, stepped to the door of her room. She half-opened it and listened. Soft steps fell behind the thin wall that separated Herbert from herself. She took a step forward, and another white figure with burning eyes appeared before her on the landing. Whether she or Herbert covered the remaining space between them, she never knew. But in a moment his hands, brutal with the avidity of passion, were upon her, and she felt herself dragged into the other room. She sank on the bed. He knelt beside her, and grasped the thin fabric of the night-gown that covered her breast. The fragile stuff tore across, and she lay before him, white, quivering, athirst. . . .

Two hours later she dragged herself back to her own room, broken, appalled, repentant with the repentance that grows from fear. She had heard Herbert leave the house, and she was alone with her weak misery. Now that her passion was, for the hour, satisfied, the enormity

of her action came upon her, not in the light of any moral perception, but through the fear of that strong man, her husband. She had never seen him thoroughly aroused, but she remembered a story which she had heard of his felling a man to the ground under the sting of an insult, and she did not doubt for a moment that he would kill her brutally and swiftly, should he so much as suspect her adultery.

She had not the strength to dress, but sat huddled together on a low stool, the garish sunlight streaming in upon her. Her hair fell forward and covered her face, which was bent to her drawn-up knees. There was no one to see her, no one to note the look of subtle cunning that stole upon her face, that made it look aged and cowardly and terrible. She had come to a resolve: Andrew must not suspect her. Hence she must play the part of an affectionate wife with unswerving exactness, with sincerity, even, if need be, with passion. The dominant chord that sounded in her nature now was the chord of fear, a fear that might easily rise to frenzy, and that rendered her capable of strange energy

and resolve. She was afraid of the hour of Andrew's coming; she thought that every glance, every gesture might betray her. She had no conception of the security of his mind which, infinitely removed from any passionate preoccupations, would never be deflected in the direction of her guilt.

She stood before the mirror in her bedroom, and scanned her features for the subtle impress of guilt which, she thought, must be stamped there. Anxiously, all the while, she listened for Herbert's step in the house, but the hours passed and he did not come. The day darkened to evening; she had not the courage to light the gas; and strange, spectral shadows began to waver in the gaunt rooms. It was the maid who finally and mercifully recalled her to the practical necessities of life.

She smoothed her hair, washed her burning eyes, and went downstairs with a vague perception of the quietude that, amid much dissatisfaction, had characterised her married life, and which now she was to know no more. She prepared the dinner with weary carefulness, intent

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that Andrew's attention should not be made to dwell upon her in any way. When, at last, she heard him open the front door, a tremour passed over her limbs and she felt, palpably almost, the sudden whiteness of her face.

She met him in the dining-room and, going to him swiftly, put her arms about his neck. A shiver of animal repulsion ran through her, but she persisted.

"I'm so glad to see you, Andy."

He put an awkward hand on her hair, and a faint smile passed, shadow-like, over his face.

"That's good," he said, slowly.

She waited yet a few minutes, hoping that Herbert would come to dinner, and feeling an immense forlornness as all hope of his coming faded. Andrew, too, became impatient.

"He knows what the hour is. If he don't come, we go ahead. That's all. Maybe we ain't fine enough for him."

Kate could have struck him for this last remark. Instead, she laughed assentingly. But something unnatural in that laugh must have

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struck Andrew. He looked at her in momentary surprise. Then his eyes drooped again.

Thus they sat opposite each other at the board, husband and wife, and every indifferent or thoughtless glance he gave her struck like a blow. And as her fear increased, so did her hatred, until the man appeared to her disordered imagination in the guise of a monster who hounded her through life. Through all she talked and laughed more than was her wont, and he responded in a kindly enough fashion. Only when they arose from the table the thought came to her suddenly, that he had said nothing of last night or of the stupor in which he had left her in the morning. She picked up a book, but the lines swam and danced before her eyes. She could not bend her mind to her most cherished fancies. It seemed, too, as if his quiet friendliness of bearing must be the mask of a subtle and monstrous hypocrisy from behind which would presently emerge the face of the avenger. The longer the blow delayed, the more her nerves were tortured, and the more the fatal

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necessity for some immediate action grew upon her.

When, at a few minutes after ten, Andrew pushed aside the mass of papers which he had been reading, she sprang up with a gesture of intense relief that surprised him. His slow eyes sought hers which fell beneath their gaze. Then a satisfied smile appeared on his face.

"I wouldn't go to those Earle people again, Kit. You ain't used to drinking, and it's all wrong. You should have seen yourself this morning."

A joyous lightness came into her heart. Perhaps there was less to be feared than she had thought. Nevertheless it was her business to be wary. She knew her own capacity for treachery.

Alone in their bedroom, she hovered around him with light caresses, by which to blind his eyes and disarm his vigilance. He responded, to her horror and disgust, with a greater warmth than was his wont. She had not the strength to repel him when he took the initia-

tive, and gave herself up to him with a numb agony in her heart. . . .

Her hours of freedom from Andrew's presence now became hours of wild recklessness. The longer her husband remained silent and unsuspicuous of her daily adulteries, the sharper grew the intolerable, hidden spur of fear. Daily she swore to herself that he should never touch her again; nightly the fear of him drove her into his arms. In the meantime she fought another silent and furious battle with Herbert. His senses were completely under her sway; his moral fibre, relaxed by his first experience in New York, was weakened. But she knew the meaning of the far look that often came into his eyes, of the sudden withdrawal, of the hours in which he looked upon her, in the very tempest of their passion, with something like despair.

They usually took a short walk in the afternoon, meeting somewhere near the house, since Kate did not wish the servant to see them leaving it together. The severity of the winter was now softened, and there were many days on which a faint hint of spring hung in the air.

Then Kate hung on Herbert's arm, and they explored the pleasant mazes of the tangled Bronx. A thousand times she asked him whether he loved her, and as many times he answered with a weary yes. She deplored the fact that they could never spend an evening together at the theatre or elsewhere, in that glittering world for which she longed. One day when she again spoke of this regret, he said, almost harshly:

"It's just as well that we haven't got the chance."

"Oh, Herbert!" she cried.

"I haven't any money," he explained. "I ought to be looking for work and working now. Instead . . ."

"I'm sure I don't keep you from working," she answered, "you have all your evenings."

Almost imperceptibly he shrugged his shoulders which had taken on a slight stoop in the last months.

"You don't understand, Kate," he said.

"Oh, isn't it awful to be poor," she sighed. "If only you could take me away somewhere,

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and we could be alone together always—always."

He shrank back from her.

"Do you love me enough for that?"

She thought that he was happy in the consciousness of her love, and redoubled her assertions.

"And your husband?" The words wrung themselves from him harshly and with difficulty.

"I don't care!" she cried. "I never loved him."

He looked at her coldly.

"What a woman you are, Kate. I never thought such things possible. You don't despise yourself, then?"

"Do you despise yourself?"

"God knows how much," he answered.

She thought that he was posing, and fell silent. To her, their mornings and their afternoons were divinely romantic; they seemed to make up to her for so much that she had never enjoyed. Andrew appeared to her merely as an enemy who must be, for a time, placated. It was only by clothing them with an unreal and

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self-conscious romance that she could think of her lover's scruples as anything less than ridiculous.

"I don't see why you should worry," she said. "I don't think Fred Castle despises himself much!"

"I don't suppose he does," Herbert agreed, "but that's different, different."

She felt that the beautiful afternoon had been spoiled, and suffered from the want of harmony between her desires and his. She knew no way of silencing the discord save one, and so when they reached the house she followed him to his room.

"Don't light the gas," she said.

She pulled down the shades so that the room was in complete darkness. Then she went a little distance from him, into the deepest shadow, and when she approached him again, she twined her warm, bare arms about his neck. . . .

She had scarcely time to dress and run downstairs, when Andrew came. He looked at her in surprise.

"I've been sick all day," she faltered. "My head aches so."

The explanation satisfied him.

"Better take some quinine. Maybe you're getting the grip."

She was rarely sick, and hence the appeal to Andrew on that score was not dulled. She had to endure his clumsy solicitude, and even the coarse remedies that he went out to buy. But, at least, she felt that she could dare on that evening to be quiet and undemonstrative. She insisted on helping to prepare the dinner, and was startled by the sudden onslaught of a heavy rainstorm without. It carried a peculiar meaning to her. Herbert had not recently taken his dinners with them, and she had persuaded Andrew that the hours he was forced to keep made it impossible. Now she knew that Herbert would not be able to go, and she felt that her nerves would barely sustain her through a meal in the presence of both men.

She entered the dining-room with a supreme effort. Andrew and Herbert were already at the table: the former aggressive, the work-

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ingman in shirt-sleeves, as he always was in the presence of what he conceived to be hostile influences; the latter playing nervously with his knife and fork. Herbert looked pale and worn, and Kate, partly from love, but also from defiance, would have been glad to throw her arms around him there, in her husband's presence. For the first time, she perceived the full extent of her cowardice and hated herself for it. She knew that her studious avoidance of Herbert's glance was in itself a suspicious circumstance. But, for the life of her, she could not act otherwise.

Herbert scarcely spoke, and when he did, stopped after a few, hesitating words. The atmosphere grew tenser and tenser with the silent conflict that it held, so that even Andrew was moved from his wonted stolidity. Herbert, without finishing his coffee, went from the room. Andrew got up and stretched his arms.

“Lord, what a funny fellow! Acts like a fool.”

“Oh, I don't know,” she answered, with a queer quaver in her voice.

Andrew turned aside in disgust.

"You never seem to know anything sensible."

She sat down, but to-night the situation was too much for her endurance. Outside, the rain still swished and pattered. She got up.

"I think I left a book in our room."

Andrew nodded, and she ran swiftly up the stairs. From afar she saw the lamp-light gleaming from Herbert's room. She crept nearer, and through the door, which was, as usual, ajar, she saw him sitting at his table. He had folded his arms on the table, and bent his head over them. His attitude was that of a man dejected to the uttermost, broken and desperate. Stealthily she crept toward him and touched his hair. He sprang up, taken by surprise, and the chair on which he had been sitting, clattered resoundingly to the floor. They stood looking at each other, not daring to move or to speak, the roaring of the rain in their ears. He pointed to the door; but when she saw the look almost of hatred in his eyes, she clung to him desperately, hoping, in that blind moment, that her husband would enter the room

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and slay them both. Herbert tried to release himself from her grasp, but a wild impulse made her cling the more desperately, and a silent struggle followed. At last he forced her to the door and flung her, reeling, into the hall. Softly he closed his door and turned the key in the lock.

She stood on the dark landing, wave after wave of black misery sweeping over her. She could not go down again; the tears choked her, and she could not call to Andrew. She went into her room and flung herself, sobbing, on the bed. Only for a minute she lay there. Then the extreme danger of the situation came over her. The storm still raged. Herbert was, to Andrew's knowledge, in the house, and she remained upstairs in silence. She staggered from her room and down the stairs—a hunted, breathless creature—and came into her husband's presence.

"My headache is worse every minute," she faltered.

He looked up with real concern.

"Want a doctor?"

She shook her head.

“Then, if I were you, I’d go to bed.”

“Yes,” she gasped, “I think I’d better.”

The relief was so immediate and so un hoped for, that now she could have cried for joy. The sudden cessation of pain and fear seemed infinitely sweet, and she lay down on her bed in the healing darkness of the room with a sense of deep comfort and repose.

The next day she confronted Herbert.

“Why did you treat me so, last night?”

“Because you leave me no peace—none. I can’t work, I can’t think; my whole existence is crumbling, and you have only one thought.”

“I love you,” she said, and the tears streamed down her face. “I love you, and I am so unhappy.”

He put a reluctant hand on her shoulder. His touch had a certain detached tenderness as if in pity of all life and all suffering.

“My God,” he said, “why did all this have to happen!”

She heard the remorse and regret in his voice, and cried out:

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“Herbert! Are you sorry?”

A white, tired look stole over his face, a look of lost energy and lost hope, and sullen acquiescence in a fate stronger than his human will, and he answered:

“No.”

The word satisfied her, and she drew his head to her breast.

X

THE catastrophe that Kate had feared less and less each day took her, when it came, almost unawares. Yet she faced it with a presence of mind which struck even her, in the trembling retrospect, as remarkable. It was on a dark, early, wind-shaken spring morning that Andrew suddenly stooped before the pine bureau of their bedroom. He held in his hand something that she could not discern; he carried it to the meagre light of the window, and looked at it curiously. That moment of delay saved her. In it she was able to divine that a crisis was upon her. Andrew turned slowly:

“Who does this belong to?”

She drew farther into the shadow, ignorant of what damning proof he might be holding in his knotty hand.

“What?”

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“This . . . tie!”

His strong, hoarse voice dwelt menacingly on the word.

“A tie? Oh, yes.” She stepped lightly forward as the triumph of her sudden inspiration tingled through her. “I found it on the stairs, last night. I guess it belongs to Mr. Vincent. He must have dropped it.”

Deliberately Andrew folded the tie and put it in his pocket.

“Funny to drop a tie on the stairs.”

“Wasn’t it?” she said, lightly.

She played the grim comedy through to the end. When Andrew was ready to set out to his work, she believed that his suspicion, if he had had any, was gone. But she knew that her security was gone too, because the idea having once gripped Andrew’s mind, would never again relax its hold, and that henceforth he would watch her. She broke down completely under the horror of the thought. Her nerves had been under all the restraint of which she was capable. She burst into Herbert’s room. Her loose hair fell wildly over her eyes.

She clutched him, and, even at that moment of a terror so genuine, her words had a tincture of the memories of the false romance in which her mind and her senses had revelled.

“We are lost, Herbert, we are lost!”

He turned to her a white, tense face.

“Your husband . . . ?”

“He found a tie of yours. You left it in my room yesterday, and he suspects.”

Herbert recovered himself.

“Oh, only suspects!”

“But don’t you see,” she urged, “that he’s bound to, now?”

“No, I don’t see. It wouldn’t do for me to go at once . . . but . . .”

She flung him from her.

“Go! Do you want to kill me? Oh, you coward!”

She saw him set his teeth.

“Coward enough, God knows, to come into this house and . . . but everything isn’t lost yet.”

“Oh, no,” she mocked him, “of course not. It’ll be just fine now, won’t it, with Andrew

watching and coming home suddenly, and maybe finding us in bed together."

"Hush!" he cried. Then a thoughtful look came over his face. "How is it that he never suspected anything till now?"

She drew herself up, and fixed his eyes with hers.

"Oh, he hasn't had a chance to be suspicious. He's got such an affectionate wife. She's always ready to be loved when he wants her; she's always ready to be taken in his arms. So, how can he be suspicious? And, if she ever thought that he might be, why, she took good care to rouse his passion. It was hard work, too, sometimes."

"You . . . you . . ."

A great vein stood out on Herbert's forehead.

"I did it for your sake!" she cried.

His rage broke like a wave.

"I didn't, couldn't think such vileness. You might better have let him kill us both at once."

"Well, I didn't think so," she said, sullenly.
"What are you going to do now?"

He walked up and down the room with nervous tread.

"I don't know," he said. "I'll have to think it all out. I don't even know who's to blame for all this." He turned to her suddenly. "I won't have my life ruined unless I have to!"

She came close to him. The moment gave her subtlety and resource.

"You told me that you loved me."

"Not at first."

"But since?"

"Yes, since."

"How many times?"

Her eyes devoured him.

"God only knows!"

She crept closer to him and closer; she twined her arms about his neck; her lips full, half-open, sensuous, sought his mouth. Heavily breathing they lay side by side.

"You can't, you can't desert me . . ."

But with a sudden resoluteness he turned his face away. Her passion faded, her strength was broken. She staggered from the room and left him lying with averted eyes. . . .

An hour later she heard the slamming of a door, and saw Herbert with rapid steps leave the house. Then a sudden helplessness and terror came over her. She could bear her fate alone no longer. She dressed herself feverishly and set out to seek help and counsel with Clara Earle.

She found that lady lounging comfortably in a dressing-gown, but with a look of sinister pre-occupation on her face. She looked at Kate keenly.

“You look like a death’s head.”

Kate’s overwrought nerves gave way and she wept bitterly.

Clara watched her with a cruel impassiveness.

“Life is hell, isn’t it?”

She picked up a cigarette from the table, lit it, and blew out the smoke in great clouds. The action diverted Kate’s attention.

“I didn’t know you smoked!”

“I didn’t very much, until recently.”

Kate fell silent, so forbidding her friend’s face seemed to be. But the latter helped her.

“What’s the matter, Kate?”

Kate wrung her hands in her lap.

“It’s awful! Herbert and I, you know . . .”

“I can imagine. Well?”

“Well, Andrew found one of Herbert’s ties in our bedroom. He’ll grow more and more suspicious now.”

“Yes, yes,” Clara said, impatiently.

“I told Herbert, and he doesn’t seem to love me——”

“How much?”

“He doesn’t seem to love me. He wants to go, to go!”

Clara laughed—a harsh, bitter, almost coarse laugh.

“Kate, are you such a lunatic that you thought the man cared for you, except to satisfy his lust? Don’t you know that when he wants to love anybody—what he calls love—it’ll be some fool of a girl he meets at prayer-meeting? We’re just good for one thing. What you’ve got to do is to make it worth your while.”

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Kate moaned under the brutal onslaught, and Clara went on:

"Got any money from him, any presents, anything?"

Then Kate sprang up.

"I haven't got anything; I don't want anything. I love him, and I want him to love me. I want him to take me with him, and he treats me like, like——" She hunted for words.

"Like a harlot that he can't use comfortably any longer. I know, I know, I know."

Clara got up. She tore at the collar of her gown with fevered fingers, dead-white but for the yellowish tinge of nicotine.

"I know," she said, in a thick, hot voice, "I love Fred. I'd go and beg with him. I'd sell myself for him; I'd be damned to hell everlasting for him. And he dawdles around, and I never know whether he'll come to-morrow or not. I take the truck he gives me, because I don't know when I'll be flung in the street, and I mightn't have the sand to take carbolic. Lord, I know. Vincent's too young. That's what's wrong. Fred has plenty of means, and he's old

enough to let a habit take hold of him. The best you can do is to let the man go."

"And what shall I do?"

"Be a good child and obey your hubby. You don't appreciate the holy state of matrimony. It's something you can always fall back on—like a balance in the bank."

"I won't!" Kate cried, hotly.

"Rats!" Clara cried, scornfully. "It's a full manger, anyhow."

"Mine isn't," Kate objected, feebly.

"Good enough, and, anyhow, it's safe."

"And do you think," Kate asked, "do you think that I can just sit still and see Herbert go?"

Clara knotted her brows.

"Yes, you can. I couldn't. That's the difference between us, and it's your good luck."

Kate protested hotly against this judgement of herself, but her friend listened with a cool smile. Hence, she took her departure, as helpless and as hopeless as she had come.

At home the house was empty. Herbert had not returned, and it was still many hours before

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Andrew would. Kate went upstairs, fearful lest she should see in Herbert's room any signs of a preparation to move. But everything was in its accustomed place, and she breathed more freely.

On entering the dining-room, she found a letter from her sister in Massachusetts. It was long and rambling and told, in a vein of quiet and simple satisfaction, of the cares of children, and of the occupations on the farm where Mrs. Greer lived. It promised to be a good year, the crops and the stock were doing well. She sent her respects to Mr. Bathurst and her love to Kate, and hoped that the latter would visit them during the coming summer.

Kate read the letter with a strange rebellion in her heart—a rebellion against even the far shadow of the simple, unromantic life that arose from the pages before her. A quivering contempt for her sister came over her. If Maggie was satisfied with that! She was not, thank heaven; she would die before she would subside into a life so flat, so undistinguished, so devoid of any rich pleasures. She could see,

ith striking precision, the elements of her sister's life—the tumbling children, the heavy-booted husband, the fields and the stables. She could see the pleasures of that life, too. And the thought of the church sociables and church uppers filled her with an even greater disgust. By contrast, she was almost content with her own life, despite its present terrors and desperate chances. She felt sure, suddenly, that she could hold Herbert and, in some way, blind Andrew to her sins. She determined to be strong, cunning, passionate; to go to any extreme rather than face such a life as her sister lived, or as she must live if she lost her lover.

When Andrew came home she did not go to the door to meet him as had been her wont of late. She determined to watch his mood and his movements and, if necessary, assume an air of outraged innocence. When she saw his face, he saw that he had been brooding on the incident of the tie, and she swished about the room as insolent and provoking a manner as she could. Andrew put his hand in his pocket with a hesitating movement.

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"Here's that tie. You'd better give it back to Vincent."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Why don't you do it yourself? You seem to take a lot of interest in it!"

He put the strip of silk on the sideboard, and a satisfied smile crept over his face. She saw that whatever curiosity he had had, was fading from his mind. He sat down as usual, and with his usual satisfaction ate his dinner. All evening she was on the alert for Herbert's step, and shortly before ten she heard it on the stairs. A feeling of triumph came over her. Life, she felt sure, would yet adjust itself in harmony with her desires.

That night Andrew bent over her, a slow desire gathering force in his glances.

"You look mighty nice, Kate!"

She drew her gown over her shoulders.

"Oh, is that so?"

She moved away from him, extracting the utmost use from his rare moment of passion. As he stretched out his hand toward her, she eluded him gracefully. His voice was husky.

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“What’s the matter with you, Kit?”

“Oh, nothing. You’re mean and suspicious; that’s all.”

He swung his arms around her flexible body.

“Come, now, I guess I’m not so bad.”

She accepted the implied apology. Coming from him, it was in the nature of a distinct victory. She went to bed without further resistance, and dreamed of Herbert in her husband’s arms.

PART THREE

XI

As the spring days drew on, Herbert Vincent spent more and more of his time in lonely rambles. The winter had tried him severely. His enervated body and sensitive nerves drank in gratefully the warmer air; his eyes sought, with a sense of refreshment, the reluctant green that sprang up in many a little plot of open ground, and the shy leaves that pierced the branches of the trees. He had procured some work, half-scholarly, half-journalistic, which brought him a small income, and made it possible for him to dispense with his father's allowance. He did the work slowly and with difficulty. Tasks that, in other days, would have been mere child's play to him, now required an iron energy of labour — He had to attack them again and again, and

often sat for hours at his table staring stupidly before him. Then he fled out into the open where the oppression of his own paralysed will was less heavy. He walked about in the Bronx, in queer streets that had not lost a touch of the open country, streets lined with cottages that sat on little heights of greensward. Between them were vistas of far, green, rolling country. There he would stand and gaze and, in the mere pleasure of the eye, lose consciousness for a while of the bitter burden of his fate.

He had no illusions as to the quality of the actions and passions that made the staple of his life. And yet he acquitted himself of a part, at least, of the blame that rightly attached to them. Not that he indulged in any fatalistic delusion. But he had a dim perception that the coil of a process larger and more potent than the individual lives in question had drawn him into its grasp, and that his lack of strength to escape those monstrous toils was an inherent lack, due to his youth, his circumstances, his temperament, and not to any governable deviation of his conscious will. These perceptions

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on his part were, of course, both fragmentary and fitful. But they were there, and they grew out of a reflective review of all that had befallen him in New York.

The initial impulse toward Lucy Treat had been one that transcended, for him, both reason and morality. Thus, with these passions had the gods fashioned man—not otherwise. Lucy had deserted him, mainly on account of the hesitancy that grew from his own nobler self—in that fact lay a grim irony—and that desertion had left him with nerves and senses keyed up to a quivering pitch. Then he had met Kate, and Kate had been waiting for him. He knew with an absolute certainty of knowledge that he, being the man he was, would never have stretched out a violent hand after even assumed virtue. But the open flame had leaped to meet his. Kate had told him of her dissatisfaction with her life, of her longing for an intenser passion, of her half-conscious perception that he was to be its instrument. A half-sentimental chivalry alone kept him from confessing to himself that she was far more blameworthy than

he, since in her all promptings of the spirit had been deadened by desire upon a low plane.

He tried again and again to define to himself (especially in the days of struggle that now ensued) the relations that he sustained to Kate. That those relations had in them no element of the ideal—so much was unhappily certain. Nor was this prevented solely by the criminal conditions of their love. A lofty passion might have burned these away in its own consuming flame. But their relation (at least from his point of view) was one of the body merely. Here, however, there crept into his reckoning up of the situation a strange and fatal element: he found that he could not desire and enjoy steadily the body of a woman without beginning to feel for her a purely human tenderness. The touch of that familiar hand, the liquid glance of that eye into which he had gazed so deeply and so often—these unnerved him, not because they touched his senses, but because—by a more final and fatal conquest—they touched his heart. He did not love her; his senses were satiated; but he pitied her. Away

from her he made heroic resolves how, for her own sake and his, he would break off the *liaison* that crushed him, and prevented her from even attempting a fulfillment of her obvious duties; but when she knelt before him, her head on his knees, and told him that she could not live without him, the compassion that he had for her constrained him, again and again, to insincerity.

The incident of Andrew's finding the tie, however, small as it was, created a deeper upheaval and revolt in him. He had never counted upon their being discovered; had never, in truth, given that contingency more than a passing thought. Now it confronted him, and the fear that he felt was not a fear of Andrew's possible violence. He was quite prepared to face a weapon as the wages of sin. A grimmer horror took his imagination. Suppose Andrew were not to kill; suppose he simply turned Kate out of doors? It was this possibility that rendered Herbert desperate. She would then be thrown defenceless on his hands. There was no sophistication by which he could avoid assuming the full responsibility of her fate, and such

a fate seemed to him, frankly, worse than death. For they had not a thought, a hope, an aspiration in common. Freed from the constraint of present conditions, she would ask for the pleasures that he was too poor to give her. The end would be hatred, disgust, contempt.

In all these difficulties he had no one to whom to turn for help or counsel. Hence, it was with some pleasure and a sudden brightening of his spirits that one day, when he was downtown on business, he saw the tall, graceful figure of Frederic Castle sauntering a little jauntily along the street. Castle stopped him at once.

"Glad to see you! We never had that little talk, did we?"

"No," Herbert replied, "and I've often thought of the possibility."

Castle's languid eyes brightened.

"Well, then, let's go in here and have a drink."

He led the way into the café of the Hotel Victoria, and they took their seats at one of the polished wooden tables. It was the mid-afternoon hour, and they were the only guests. Long

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shadows lay along the room, in which, as yet, only a few lamps burned. Castle ordered the drinks, and then laid the cigarettes on the table.

"Still living at the Bathursts'?" Castle asked.

A swift glance of comprehension passed between the two men as Herbert nodded. Then Castle said, softly:

"Clara gave me a hint or two, one day . . ."

"Yes?" Herbert said, tentatively.

"Yes, and ever since I've wanted to look you up. Only, I've been too lazy. Heavens, the days pass and the weeks and the years, and nothing is done—nothing!"

Herbert smiled.

"Unless one has to work."

"That is a blessing," the older man said, slowly, "or else, I suppose it is. The difficulties of life are always the same, and to have ~~—~~ material burdens added must be pretty tough."

"Your difficulties don't seem very oppressive," Herbert said, lightly.

Castle leaned forward, supporting his chin on one hand.

"Aren't they? Aren't they? *Si jeunesse savait!* Look here, my young friend, do you know that I'm forty-five?"

"No," Herbert said, "it doesn't seem possible."

"Doesn't it? But it is so. And how do you think I feel when I look back upon the forty-five years misspent in drunkenness and debauchery?" He gazed into Herbert's amazed eyes. "You are quite right. I don't talk that way, habitually. In fact, almost never. To what good? But I want to frighten you into running away, if necessary, in the middle of the night."

In Herbert's mind arose a lurid memory of Doyle giving the same advice to him in days that now seemed long ago.

"I suppose you feel sorry for Kate Bathurst?"

"More than I can say."

"Exactly. So did I, in every case. And so I've gone through life—always dragging a

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chain, always rendered incapable of any true effort. When death or accident broke the chain, a new one was always at hand. I tell you, I've had moments of such profound despair that I've thought of the cloister as a refuge. The worst of it is—it's not even lust with me now. It's curiosity, habit, weakness. And the long and the short of my story is," he laughed harshly, "that the wages of sin is death."

"And what becomes of the women?" Herbert asked.

"That differs with their temperament and their circumstances. If I left Clara, she wouldn't stay with Earle. She'd keep a brothel, and drink herself to death. As for Mrs. Bathurst—well, I have an idea that she would do nothing. And, in so far, you are fortunate."

"I don't believe it," Herbert said.

"Don't you? Has the lady offered to kill herself?"

"Yes."

"A very excellent sign that she will do nothing of the sort. If you knew how many farewell letters I've received, how many times I've

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been invited to witness the death agony of the fair sex, and how they all survived buxomly—ah, if you knew!"

Castle laughed.

"That threat is a fraud, like everything else between heaven and earth—except a very few. And that reminds me, you must come to see us; my sister and I live together; we're always at home Wednesdays. I think it'll do you good to come."

Herbert promised to go to the Castle house on the following Wednesday. Then the two men separated, and Herbert sought for a place to dine. He had not, of late, been able to force himself to take dinner with the Bathursts, though he knew how good a stroke of policy his occasional presence might be. But that last hypocrisy he felt to be beyond him. He could not break bread with Andrew Bathurst. Hence, he wandered over to Third Avenue, where he could get dinner for twenty-five cents. The food was bad, but the environment was worse. There was something peculiarly depressing in the utter shabbiness, sometimes almost raggedness,

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of the waiters' jackets. Mimicking the cut and texture habitual in a richer world, these garments seemed to Herbert like the bitter dregs of old feasts, the discarded coverings of ancient revelry. As for the food, he accustomed himself to eat that unthinkingly. He accepted it, with a rather recently acquired resignation, as part of the necessary and disagreeable routine of life.

He went home as late as possible, and immediately up to his room. There he lit the lamp and tried to settle down to work, but the room was full of strange scents and shadows, memories and regrets. It was alive with Kate, with every languid movement of her passionate body, with the touch of her garments, with the penetrating pictures of hours of love. He walked about the room, touching one object after another: here she had leaned her bosom; here she had stood before him for the first time, unashamed; here she had knelt before him in an agony of despair, had leaned her arms upon his knees and covered them with her hair.

He sprang up from the seat which he had at

last taken. He wanted to escape from this haunted place. But he heard Andrew's heavy tread on the stairs, and it seemed to him that the meeting would be unendurable. And, as the hours passed, a measure of peace came to him. He lost himself in dreams of fair destinies that might yet be his if he could recover his youth from the bondage that the Enchantress had brought upon him.

He awoke early on the next morning, with an immediate and vivid sense of the situation and its dangers. Softly he got up and locked the door on the inside. He knew himself absolutely determined not to open it when Kate, her husband gone, would hurry to him. But he knew, also, the rending pangs of pity that he would suffer. He dressed himself slowly and sat down, awaiting that terrible moment. It came with a soft movement of the knob in the door. Then the movement became more and more violent and at last a desperate, hurried rattling. He heard Kate's bare feet on the floor and then her voice, soft, melancholy, pleading:
“Have you locked the door, Herbert?”

He made no answer, but he moved about noisily so that she should not believe him sick or overcome, and create a disturbance. Then the rattling at the door-knob continued, and he heard, with bitter pain, how she threw her soft body against the hard door. Tears came into his eyes and he took a step forward, but he restrained himself again with a thought of the bitter satiety and despair that his yielding would bring at the last. The soft thumping continued, mingled now with the sound of low, sharp sobs. Her lips muttered his name with every intonation of entreaty and endearment. He felt the tears run down his cheeks as he thought of the pain of that dependent heart, of the bruises of that white body that he had kissed so often and held rapturously in his arms. Then, suddenly, all was silent but for the slow movement of the retreating feet. He had won a victory, and he felt himself the veriest brute on earth. . . .

For several days she did not seek him. On the stairs she passed him, upon the occasion of their rare meetings, with averted eyes. He felt

an extraordinary compassion for her, and but little of the relief that he had anticipated. His strongest feeling was the sense he had of her loneliness. And he attributed to her an isolation of the soul that she was completely incapable of feeling. . . .

On Wednesday evening he went to the home of the Castles. He was glad of this opportunity to free himself for an hour from his gnawing preoccupations. He found the house—on Seventy-first Street, near Riverside Drive—charming and charmingly furnished. A rich and subtle harmony pervaded the large rooms, all lined by the tall book-shelves bearing busts and vases of antique grace of outline. Only a few people were there, mostly members of some artistic profession. Frederic Castle received him warmly.

“Come, let me present you to my sister.”

He led him to the end of the room and introduced him to a tall, graceful figure in a flowing cream-coloured gown. He looked up into a pair of grave, grey eyes and felt the cool clasp of a long, delicate, intelligent hand. A moment

more and he observed how a single lock of grey was combed back with her rich and tawny hair.

She spoke to him in accents so gracious and musical, that he thought he had never heard their like. She put him at his ease with the rarest art. He looked up and saw the eyes of Fred Castle dwell upon his sister with love and reverence. He mingled with the other guests to whom he was gradually introduced. A quietude of spirit reigned here, a suaveness of manner which he rightly attributed to Elsa Castle's influence. A little later in the evening Mendez, the well-known pianist, sat down at the piano and the company fell silent. The man played the prelude of "Parsifal," that most moving and strangely nerve-stirring composition. Herbert listened, and it seemed to him that all spiritual mysteries came nearer to him; that the secret voices of the world called to him. And yet a faint, fugitive passion trembled in his blood which seemed to bring the eternal mysteries nearer and give them body and form. He looked at Elsa Castle. Her head leaned upon her right hand and her eyes were tense; they

seemed to look upon infinity. The player ceased, but no applause followed. This divinest of compositions could not bear the unhallowed rudeness of a physical demonstration. Then Mendez played again, an energetic, sternly melancholy piece of Moskowski, in which sounded not only the deep tragedy of human things, but that austerity of soul that would combat the wrongs and indignities that life inflicts upon us. . . .

Late that night, under the stars, Herbert felt with a new intensity the strangeness of his degradation. New impulses were at war in him, a fresher memory of the youth that he had been but a few months before. He tried to enter the house as softly as possible, but in the deep gloom of the landing, just outside the door of his room, two soft arms were wound about his neck.

“Herbert . . .”

A sudden mist of anger and repulsion blinded him.

“How dare you!”

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"He is asleep," she gasped, "I couldn't stand it any longer. Do you hate me?"

"Yes"

She slid in a heap to the floor, and he went into his room. But the peace and high resolve that the evening had brought him were gone. Torturing doubts wrung his heart, and the old torturing pity. Was she out there, alone, in the cold? He opened the door softly, and saw her white form huddled there on the same spot. He went up to her and touched her.

"Go to bed, Kate; go!"

She clung to his feet.

"Say that you love me, Herbert; say it, or I'll shriek and he can kill us both. I don't *want* to live!"

He stood still. The degradation of the moment passed into his soul. He felt that he would never forgive her if she forced him to reiterate that fatal lie.

"Herbert!" she almost cried.

"I love you!" he answered, and his voice was full of hate.

XII

A week later, upon a murky morning with wild gusts vexing the wet trees, Kate came to Herbert. He saw at once that her mission was not an ordinary one. There was a new terror in her face. She held a newspaper, clutched convulsively, in her hand.

“Herbert, Dr. Earle has killed himself!”

“My God!” he muttered.

Upon both came an intense realisation of the significance of that tragedy to themselves; a gloom fell upon them. They looked at each other with fearful eyes, and saw the same thought leaping up.

“We ought to go,” Herbert stammered.

Kate nodded.

“I’ll be ready in half an hour.”

They sat side by side in the subway, but neither spoke a single word. The air between

them was charged with vivid terror and remorse. Even Kate felt a sudden revulsion at her life and its sins; even to her obscure soul, this tragedy brought a gleam of light. She glanced sideways at Herbert. He seemed brooding upon many things, but she could not divine the precise thoughts that lurked in his shadowed eyes. Only, she noticed that his shoulder did not press against hers, nor even lightly lean; that he sat beside her with more than the careful aloofness of a stranger.

They entered the well-known house, but everything seemed different to them, to-day. The very hall-boy seemed to have a solemn look upon his face. Everywhere, in the slightest detail, they came upon the presages of the tragedy that would meet their eyes upstairs.

The door of the apartment was open, and they heard from within soft, subdued movements such as people make in the presence of any happening that causes them fear. They entered, and in the parlour saw the dark coffin standing in the midst of palms. Several men and women were there—relatives of Dr. Earle

—whom neither Kate nor Herbert had ever seen before. They all wore expressions of highly respectable woe and regret; they were dressed in black clothes, which seemed to Herbert of an extremely formal mournfulness. All these persons avoided Clara Earle, who stood, cold, white, motionless, beside the bier. Herbert tried to read her face, but it was inscrutable. If any sorrow or remorse bit into her mind, she gave no outward show, but one of calm resolution. It was different with Castle, who came in bearing beautiful flowers. He seemed to have grown years older. Heavy, shadowed lines seared his face. His hands trembled. Presently, with an extraordinary self-possession, Clara picked up Kate, Herbert and Castle with her eyes, and led the way into the dining-room. She closed the door and turned the key in the lock. Then she threw herself into a chair.

“Fred, give me a nip of whiskey. The decanter is on the sideboard.”

Slowly Castle walked across the room, and did as he was bidden. With a trembling hand he poured out the spirits and handed the glass to

Clara. In subtle indecision he remained standing near her, bending over her closer and closer.

“For God’s sake, Claire, have you no feeling?”

She set down her glass on the table with a noticeable click.

“Don’t be goody-goody.” She looked at Kate. “Fred saw the way I lived with the doctor and called him a——”

“Stop!” cried Castle.

“I won’t stop!—and called him a cur a thousand times, and made love to me. And now, if you please, he wants to be sentimental and fine, and thinks I’m a brute because I don’t weep and wail!”

Castle pulled himself together and assumed his wonted demeanour.

“There’s a difference, my dear Claire, between weeping and wailing and a decent behaviour, under the circumstances.”

The woman arose, flushed, bright-eyed, magnificent in her terrible sincerity.

“Decent? Why should I be decent? You know, Fred Castle, why I married that man—

because my mother didn't want my competition, and practically forced me into an indecent situation with him. D'you suppose he was jealous of me because he loved me, or because he wanted my body all to himself? Well, he hasn't had what he wanted and, like an idiot, he killed himself. And because I won't be a damned lying hypocrite, you go on about decent behaviour."

She fell back into her chair and angrily brushed the hair out of her eyes.

"I don't know that I'll go to the funeral."

A cold shiver ran down Kate's back. She hurried over to her friend, and burst into tears.

"You must go, Clara, you must! Wasn't he your husband?"

Mrs. Earle laughed.

"You little fool! You're a nice one to say that. But it's just like you. Yes, I'll go! You and Fred can make your minds easy."

Herbert arose abruptly. The atmosphere of the place was stifling him. He met Castle's eyes in which the expression seemed to answer his thoughts. For he was wondering, all of a

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sudden, what he was doing here; how he had come to be a part of these horrors of an earthly purgatory. He would gladly have gone away alone, but he saw Kate putting on her wraps. She was evidently determined to follow him. Clara arose with a perfunctory courtesy.

"The funeral will take place to-morrow, at eleven," she said. . . .

When they were in the street Herbert sought for some excuse to free himself from Kate's companionship. In vain. His will and his mind seemed equally paralysed, and he permitted himself to be taken straight back to the Bathurst house that seemed to him now a mere lurid prison of lust over which, too, hovered the imminent shadow of death.

That evening he took dinner with the Bathursts, and was present when Kate told her husband of Earle's death. Andrew compressed his lips.

"Well, it ain't none of my business, but what could you expect?"

Kate frowned.

"It's awful, anyhow."

"Yes; women like that ought to be shut up. Now, you want to cut her out; I tell you that. I always had my suspicions of her."

"What suspicions?" Kate asked, hotly.

But Andrew vouchsafed no answer. His eyes sought Herbert's for the usual inter-male confirmation of such matters, but Herbert carefully withheld it and hurried away as soon as he could.

Next morning he could not find it in his heart to plead any superficial excuse for staying away from Dr. Earle's funeral, and so he again submitted to the dreary ride with Kate. At the Earle house he got only a passing sight of Clara. Castle, Kate and himself, as the only friends of the dead man's wife, were hurried into one carriage, and set out on the apparently endless ride to the cemetery. Castle looked old and worn. More than ever his dark skin had a distinct olive tinge. All speech seemed difficult to him this morning, but he looked at Kate in a way that showed that but for her presence he might have spoken out.

They passed dead levels of grimy city-lands,

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railroad crossings, poverty-stricken cemeteries, a few straggling fields upon which the very fruits of the earth seemed to have lost the freshness of burgeoning and growth.

"It's like life," Castle said, softly, "all grey, all grey. That's the reason we try to deceive ourselves with glitter in New York. But it never deceives."

"There must be something else," Herbert answered.

He was thinking of the something else. His heart turned to far-off days. Wrong-headed, foolish, even cruel, the old faiths might be; but his soul felt, in the presence of this man to whom the world was all in all, that they and they only were on the path that leads to salvation. For they had an ideal that transcended the world, that went behind the disheartening show of things, that wrung even from the most piteous, from the most sordid circumstances of life, a bracing lesson and a kindly hope. Somehow, in some sense, he thought, there must be a Redeemer, a God, a Man. Someone to save us from this death which is called life. . . .

In the cemetery Clara came up to them, shook hands and chatted naturally enough. She glanced up at the respectably mournful family of her husband, which again did not notice her by a glance.

"He belonged to them," she said, coldly, "they can mourn for him."

Castle touched her arm.

"And yet it's questionable whether they really cared, or only looked upon him as a troublesome reprobate."

Clara's face twitched.

"That's true. Nobody cared for him. But he's not the only one."

Castle took her hand.

"Claire, I—I—"

"You? Oh, yes, you!"

There was a fierce irony in her voice, but her eyes dwelt upon him with a softened light.

The services were brief and formal, and the ride back to the city rapid enough. Mrs. Earle, regardless now of the proprieties, had gone into the carriage with her friends.

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"Are you going to stay in the same flat?"
Kate asked her.

"No; I don't know that I'll stay in any flat."

"You may stay, if you want to," Castle said.
Clara laughed.

"Will you marry me?"

He frowned.

"Claire!"

"Don't worry! I'm not that kind, you know.
I know my place."

Castle covered his face with one hand as if
to guard against a blow.

"I never knew a man who was your equal
for sheer brutality."

"That's like a man," she sneered. "He gets
you into a brutal situation, and thinks you're
indelicate to mention it. Well, here we are."

Castle started to leave the carriage with her,
but she turned upon him.

"You stay where you are! It'll be a relief
to be in the house without—any man!"

He sat down again resignedly, and the three
drove off. When Herbert and Kate also left

at the subway station, he whispered to the former:

“Come to see us. Don’t wait for any special night; just come.”

Herbert thanked him, and went off with Kate.

“What do you suppose Clara will do?” she asked, dreamily.

He shook his head.

“I’m sure I don’t know.”

“Don’t you think it’s awful of Castle not to marry her?”

Herbert saw the trap she had instinctively laid for him, but he was too tired and too disheartened to fight.

“Yes; no doubt,” he said, and immediately hated himself for the implied concession.

Kate, on the other hand, brightened up, and clung to his arm with an evident sense of possession that galled him unspeakably. When they came to the house, she made a motion as if to follow him to his room, but he turned upon her fiercely.

“I lost all this morning. I can’t lose any more time; I’ve got to work. I don’t think your

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husband would trust me for the room-rent if I earned no money."

She turned red, but went quietly away. As for Herbert, he made a feint at working, fully conscious of the futility of the attempt.

He went out for his dinner, but the food in the cheap restaurant nauseated him, and the men and women whom he saw there and on the street seemed to him grotesque and unreal. He dared not reflect upon the present; he dared not anticipate the future. With all the strength of his nature he hated the impurities into which he had fallen, not alone, not chiefly even, the sins of the body which were his, but the miasmic atmosphere which he breathed. A passion shook him—a radiant passion—for the peace that is upon the peaks of life in the calmness of austere beauty and austere thought. But all that was not for him. He had not the strength to break the tie that held him. To leave Kate, seemed to him like murder. He confused in her, strength of clinging passion with strength of soul, instinctive tenacity with love. He had

been his own undoing, and must abide in the world that he had created for himself.

Nevertheless, he could not refrain, upon the next afternoon, from hovering about the Castle house. He thought himself unworthy of stepping into the presence of Elsa Castle, and yet he rang the bell at last, and sent in his card.

She received him with exquisite kindness, and seemed to him even finer and stronger than on the previous occasion. He asked after her brother, and she looked frankly and steadily into his eyes.

“I haven’t seen much of Fred in the last few days. I think he is greatly troubled.”

Herbert wondered whether she knew why her brother was troubled, and that he was a sharer in the secret. Her next words disillusioned him.

“I am not surprised that it should be so. The situation is so difficult; it is so heartbreakingly difficult to practise justice and—mercy.”

Herbert lowered his eyes.

“May I ask,” he said, “what your view is?”

She nodded.

“I think Fred ought to marry Mrs. Earle.

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And yet," she hesitated a moment, "and yet, I am so inexperienced that I dare hardly make that plea. But, wouldn't he be happier in assuming a duty toward a heart—however unworthy—that loves him, than in—nothing?"

She had spoken simply and sincerely, and her words burned themselves into Herbert's brain. Yet, there was something in him that rebelled bitterly.

"Are you so sure," he cried, "that the result wouldn't be just sinking deeper and deeper into corruption, helping no one and losing himself entirely?"

She drew back a little.

"I don't know, Mr. Vincent, I don't know. I spoke of it because Fred always confides in me, and because I knew that you knew."

Then they spoke for a while of books and music and other impersonal things, and throughout Herbert felt cleansed by contact with her simple and gracious spirit.

"May I come again?" he asked, in going.

She held out her hand.

"Surely; whenever you please."

He felt refreshed by his contact with her, and yet tortured by the memory of her words. They remained with him all evening and all night. He battled against the force of their meaning with all the arguments that he could muster, but they would not be downed. They coincided with all the influences that had moulded his childhood and youth and drew from this fact a double potency. Yet, deep within him he felt a conviction, not born of selfishness, that Elsa Castle was wrong. He had capitulated to evil for a time; that was no reason why he must stay in bondage forever. As for the notion of raising the woman—such a woman as Clara or Kate—to the level of one's own best self, that was the dream of an inexperienced girl. . . .

He slept late next morning, and awoke to find Kate bending over him.

"Goodness, but you've made yourself scarce the last few days," she said, querulously.

Her reproach angered him.

"I'm not responsible to you for my comings and goings."

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Her eyes looked wild under her dishevelled hair.

"No? No? I thought you loved me?"

He turned aside wearily.

"Isn't there anything in the world besides what you call love?"

She flared up.

"How long are you going to treat me this way?"

"Not much longer. I am going away."

"Oh, you are? And what's to become of me?"

"To become of you?" he echoed.

"Yes!" she cried, "that's what I said. What's to become of me?" She threw aside the kimono that she was wearing, and stood before him clad only in her clinging night-dress.

"Look at me! I ask you again, what's to become of me if you go, of me and—of our child?"

"Our child?" His voice was toneless.

"Yes, our child—yours and mine. D'you think that love has nothing to do with it, or did you take me for a harlot?"

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"But you never had a child by your husband?" he stammered.

She laughed harshly.

"Well, you see now that it was Andrew's fault. I always thought it was. It wasn't mine—that's plain."

He covered his face with his hands.

"Are you going?" she asked, and her tone was almost menacing.

"No . . ." he muttered, "no . . ."

With a comfortable sigh she crept into the bed beside him, wound her arms about him and soon fell asleep. He lay awake, moving no muscles, but her arms seemed iron manacles that cut into his flesh. . . .

XIII

FOR nearly a week, Herbert bore his agony in silence. Then, on a sudden desperate impulse, he telephoned to Castle, and, an hour later, stepped into the latter's exquisitely appointed library. Castle drew up a chair for his guest, and handed him a cigarette.

"Your voice sounded queer over the 'phone.'" Herbert drew in a lungful of smoke.

"I'm not surprised."

"Why, what's the matter?"

The younger man leaned forward.

"Castle, I must have someone to talk to, someone's advice. Kate came to me the other day and announced that—er—that our folly has had consequences—the most serious consequences, and so"

Castle sprang up.

"You mean that the woman has had the

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audacity to let *that* happen? Oh, and now she thinks, of course, that she has a mortgage on you, body and soul, for ever."

Herbert flushed. A strange, perverse loyalty to Kate arose in him.

"It's not her fault. What could she do?"

Castle laughed harshly.

"Why isn't she the mother of six?"

"It seems that her husband has not . . ."

"That man! He has three times your bodily vigour, my boy. The plain truth is, she has not chosen to have a child by him, and she wants to annex you definitely. You must go."

"It isn't possible, and it isn't right."

Castle folded his hands in front of him.

"It is possible; I will prove that to you in a moment. As to its being right—didn't we discuss that once before? Will you stay and have your will paralysed and your mind ruined, or will you go and proclaim your sins, and take her from her husband and live with her? Do you think you would be happy? do you think *she* would? I tell you the sense of evil compulsion would fill you with such hatred that you couldn't

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look upon her face. That's the kind of thing that makes men murder. And she—she would hate you because she would know that she had cheated you."

Castle resumed his seat and laughed.

"Listen to me preaching. But it's true—every word."

"And Clara Earle?" Herbert ventured.

Castle frowned.

"She's made of finer stuff, to start with, though you wouldn't think so. She wouldn't condescend to that species of deceit. And yet, even she . . . No; so far as I have wronged her, I am sorry, but our eternal misery can't make up for that. I think I'll set her up in business."

"And how am I to leave?" Herbert asked.

Castle came close to him and whispered something in his ear.

He drew back as if frightened.

"That? That?"

"It has been done before," the older man said calmly, "not once or twice, but a hundred times."

“And the result?”

“Varies with the character of the woman.
You can’t avoid an element of danger.”

“Oh, I’m far beyond that!”

And yet, when Herbert was alone once more, Castle’s plan seemed to him of a grim irony, of a subtle cruelty that shocked him. He recognised the fact that it was that—or nothing. But his soul recoiled. Nevertheless, insensibly to himself, he prepared himself to carry out the plan suggested. He had neglected the meagre work by which he earned his bread, and so for the next few days he worked with a feverish energy. Kate did not seek to interrupt him. She sat much in his room, but quietly. A deep peace seemed to have settled down upon her and she would sew for hours, calmly watching his movements. Only once during these days they came to decisive speech. He was working when, suddenly, he caught sight of her placid form in the mirror of his dressing-table, and a new thought, acutely painful, flashed through his brain. He swung around and faced her.

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“Kate!”

“Well?”

“Does your husband know?”

She laughed softly.

“Of course.”

“And what does he think?”

“Why, he’s quite proud of himself and of me.”

Herbert turned away. His heart hardened toward her. The moral callousness of her speech was unimaginable to him. This woman wanted but one thing: the satisfaction of her primordial desires. All the ethical assumptions of the social order were to her mere assumptions to be thrown away at the command of her essential instinct. Yet, she had an intuitive sense of the fact that Herbert was shocked, and so she broke out into a half-wail of querulous complaint. What would he have her do? Should she tell Andrew whose child she was going to bear, and be killed on the spot? Was it her fault that her lover had neither love nor courage nor money, that he could not and would not take her away, and so forced her to deceit?

Herbert sprang up and left the room and the house. He could not bear either the insincerity or the subtle plea of her speech. Without all was sunshine and sweetness, the blandness of the virgin spring. But to Herbert it seemed a mockery. Winter would have been more fitting to the darkness of his fate. . . .

On the way back to the house, at an hour much earlier than usual, he met Bathurst. The latter had a grave and business-like air, and Herbert's conscience smote him. But the man had, evidently, no immediate suspicions.

"How-do," Bathurst said. "I guess I can lazy around a while now, like you literary fellows."

"Did you give up your position?" Herbert asked.

"Not much, but we're out on a strike for an eight-hour day. It's been coming for some time," he continued, with an instructive air, "for quite a little time. Now it's on."

"Do you think you'll win?"

"Sure. They can't stand out against us. The workingman ain't going to be bossed

around by the capitalist much longer. He needs us more than we need him. See?"

Herbert reflected that indeed the man was in much better case than he himself; that, in truth, the workingman had now made himself the one independent person in the social order, since he had definitely discarded the courtesies and compromises and delicacies of life, which cramp and limit every liberal calling, and had frankly taken his stand upon the brute force of things.

"Will your employers try to hold out?" he asked.

"No. They've got too much sense. Scabs ain't much good."

Herbert wanted to ask how long the strike would last, but he did not dare. It occurred to him, however, that Andrew's constant presence in the house, if it lasted but a few days, would necessarily keep Kate and himself apart. That now was his chance of escape.

The two men walked slowly back to the house, and Herbert hoped that Kate had left his room. He felt relieved when he saw her on the little

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verandah. He could not see her face, but he noted that Bathurst looked toward her with a new interest.

She turned around and waved her hand. Herbert wondered at her coolness. Did she not realise what dire meaning there might have been in that companionship? They walked up the steps, and Bathurst briefly informed his wife as to the state of affairs. She turned deathly pale and, staring at Herbert, grasped the bannister. Bathurst made no motion, so that Herbert was obliged to stretch out an arm to her assistance. She leaned against him for a moment with closed eyes, then pulled herself together and entered the house. In all her movements there had been a strange abandon and familiarity. Bathurst stood perfectly still and fixed Herbert with his eyes. There was in them something sinister, brutal, menacing. But Herbert returned the look steadily. Then the glowering eyes fell and, without another word, Bathurst turned around and entered the house. He slammed the door behind him with such vio-

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lence that the frail frame structure shook and trembled like a living thing.

A minute more and he heard Kate's tearful voice.

"I'm sick, I tell you. I'm not fit to do any housework now. I'm always fainting, just like now. You don't care. I'm sorry I ever got this way."

Without intelligence, without experience, she was yet playing her comedy well. She had the strength of her weakness. A force spoke through her that infinitely transcended her individuality—the force that drives the pursuing woman. But Herbert knew that the scene on the verandah made an immediate escape impossible. Bathurst's suspicion would be the more aroused by it. Hence, he would have to delay for some days, at least.

With a heavy heart he turned back into the house, and went up to his room. Once or twice in the course of the evening, he heard the voices of Bathurst and Kate, but he could distinguish no word that was said. In spite of himself he pitied her again for the situations that she must

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endure, and then despised himself for the pity which his heart held.

The next few days were almost intolerable in their difficulty. Kate, hysterical, no doubt, through her condition, threw all discretion to the winds. In the very presence of her husband, she slipped a note into Herbert's hand. And Bathurst's eyes, though they sought to be everywhere, were too unskilled to perceive the adroit manipulation. It was more noticeable to him that she talked to Herbert whenever a chance presented itself, and that her eyes dwelt upon him with a passionate intensity. But Bathurst kept himself well in hand, although, occasionally, he seemed to have difficulty in restraining himself. But there was, after all, nothing tangible for him to lay hold of, and Herbert concealed Kate's indiscretions as far as possible.

He put off the execution of Castle's plan from day to day, held back by pity, by his sense of the raw cruelty of the blow that he must inflict. In the meantime he called on Elsa Castle as often as he dared, sincerely deeming himself un-

worthy of the contact, and yet seeking it as a refuge from the tragic spiritual meanness of the conditions that surrounded him. Miss Castle seemed, in some subtle and yet perfectly ingenuous way, to divine the quality of his need, and their talks were dedicated to the finest things in life and letters. Once they took a walk together and, as the light wind of spring touched her hair, he thought with a strange shudder of the first walk that he had taken with Kate in the dark and bitter winter, and he had it in his heart to curse God that he had not first met the woman at his side who could have saved him from so much, who, by a look, by an intonation of her voice, could liberate his spirit from the hateful bondage in which it had dwelt so long.

But always he had to return to be one of that little group on Clay Avenue: Bathurst consumed with a silent but as yet undefined passion of jealousy; Kate languorous, reckless and hysterical, and, at longer and longer intervals, Mrs. Earle who watched with a vivid irony in her eyes. At first Andrew had occasionally

gone out into the yard and pottered for hours with his scanty growth of plants, but recently he had not done so, but sat in the dining-room all day with a sullen look in his eyes and observed every movement that Kate made. Nor did the strike seem to end as soon as he had thought, and so the wretched life these three led dragged on from day to day, until Herbert felt as if bands of steel were pressing closer and closer around his chest. . . .

Late one afternoon he was walking through One Hundred and Twenty-fourth Street. He saw from afar the glint of the white and yellow light on Eighth Avenue. He was tired, and turned around for a moment. Far behind him arose the cupola of Grant's tomb against a fading evening sky of infinite purity and loveliness. A clear and horned moon hung over the grey dome—stainless, calm, utterly serene. He looked at the sky behind him and the sordid glitter of the street-lamps of the avenue before him. Did not even the appearances of material things shadow forth in no uncertain way the central necessities of the soul's life? He drew

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himself up and took a deep breath. There must be no mercy shown the evil—in himself or in others. . . .

He gave orders at the Manhattan Express Company's office that his trunk be called for the following morning at ten; he walked over to a neighbouring hotel and announced his arrival there for the next day. Then he boarded the subway and went uptown. He locked the door of his room, and immediately started to pack his possessions. He could do so unobserved, since Bathurst was keeping Kate chained in the meshes of his sullen watchfulness down-stairs. . . .

Herbert toiled on into the night, and as he dismantled his room, and as the subtle evidences and memories of his long intimacy with Kate were gradually obliterated, he felt freer. He did not go to bed until late, and even then sleep did not come to him, for he thought, with a lifting up of his heart, of the freedom that awaited him.

The morning found him less strong and certain of himself. The most difficult part of his

task was before him, and the nature of it overcame him with crushing force. It was with difficulty that he urged his feet down the stairs. When he entered the dining-room, the table and the figures of Kate and of Bathurst swam for a moment before his eyes. Resolutely, he governed his own nervousness, advanced steadily and took his accustomed seat. Kate smiled at him and Andrew muttered a curt good-morning. The meal proceeded in silence. Under the table Herbert felt Kate's foot seek his, and the action smote him with something like remorse. He lashed his sinking courage by deliberately picturing to himself his future when once he had freed himself from this terrible bondage. He knew that he need not hurry to say the words that must be said, for Andrew would not leave him and Kate alone. To say them in Andrew's presence so that Kate would be entirely defenseless and forced to silence—this was the cruel compulsion that Castle had advised. Herbert could not help looking at Kate and wondering whether she had any premonition of the approaching scene. He strove to speak, but

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his voice would not rise. The second time he succeeded. His blood tingled under his skin and his heart throbbed.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Bathurst," he said, "but I shall have to leave you—almost at once."

Kate leaned back in her chair, her fork half-way between her mouth and the table. But Herbert kept his eyes fixed steadily on Bathurst.

"I've got more work to do, and I must be nearer my employer's office. And so, since my week is up to-day——"

A dull shriek arose, and Kate fell heavily on her side. Bathurst sprang up, a virulent crimson in his face and neck.

"What in hell . . . !"

Herbert arose, white, but suddenly calm and self-contained. He was quite prepared to be shot then and there, but for the moment nothing seemed to matter.

"Suppose we help Mrs. Bathurst up," he said.

Andrew glared, but yielded to the fearless-

ness of a finer will. Together they raised Kate, put her on a couch and sprinkled some water from a tumbler on her face and throat. She was strong, and recovered herself in a few minutes.

“Herbert!” she whispered, audibly.

Herbert swung around, but Andrew was sitting perfectly still and staring out of the window. Suddenly he arose and came up to Herbert.

“When did you say you’d go?”

“This morning. My trunks will be called for in a short time.”

Bathurst nodded and turned to Kate.

“Get up and go to bed! You ain’t used to fainting!”

Kate pulled herself together.

“You know I’m not well, Andrew.”

“I know . . .” he muttered. “I know . . .”

Kate dragged herself upstairs, and Herbert went out on the verandah, ostensibly to look for the express waggon that was to call for his trunks. He heard Bathurst walk slowly up and down in the dining-room. He anticipated little

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danger from the man, whose mind was heavy and slow to move, and whose rage seemed never quite to reach the point of explosion. After a while the steps ceased too, and Herbert saw him sit at a window, angrily smoking a pipe. The man's face showed at once rage and bewilderment. When he saw Herbert's glance, he withdrew from the window and went slowly and thoughtfully up the stairs.

XIV

THE waggon of the express company came with fair promptitude, and Herbert led the two blue-capped men upstairs. Neither on the stairs nor on the landing was anyone to be seen. Silently the two men took the first trunk and made their way downstairs. Herbert stood still in his room, taking a last look at the strangely familiar place. A keen regret, now at the moment of eternal severance, rose in his throat. After all, he reflected, she had been kind to him when everyone else was indifferent; she had loved him in the double loneliness of his heart. The men came back for the second trunk, and something that was unmistakably moisture rose into Herbert's eyes. He *would* have liked to see Kate just once more. Mournfully, he, too, went down the stairs in the wake

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of the expressmen. There was nothing more for him to await here. The episode was over.

The second trunk was a little broader than the first, and the men had some little difficulty in getting it through the door. Herbert stopped behind them, and waited as they unfastened the second wing of the door to gain more room. Suddenly, as he stood there, a wild shriek resounded above, and a white, wild-eyed figure tore herself loose and sprang down the stairs. At the second landing the figure stumbled, swayed perilously for the twinkling of an eye during which his heart stood still, and fell heavily—a moveless bundle—at his feet.

He knelt beside her, mad with remorse and fear. The two men from the express waggon hurried to her, but stood there, helpless and undecided. Herbert looked up, and saw Bathurst slowly coming down the stairs. The man's eyes were bloodshot, and his great limbs seemed to tremble. The full force of the blow had come upon him suddenly. But there was a fierce setting of the jaw as he looked at Kate's prostrate form. Herbert was sprinkling her face with

water which one of the expressmen had brought, but she did not revive. He looked up, and his eyes and Bathurst's met. The latter choked and stuttered in his speech.

"You better send for an ambulance, you damned—you damned—" His voice broke off, and then rose like the roar of an angry bull. "Send for it, before I smash you both to hell!"

He hit out wildly, but Herbert avoided the blow easily. Then he staggered into the parlour and slammed the door behind him.

Herbert chafed Kate's wrists and temples, but ineffectually. One of the expressmen had run to telephone for an ambulance, and soon a little crowd of loafers and urchins assembled at the door. Bathurst did not reappear even when, at the end of fifteen minutes, the ringing of the ambulance was heard at the door. A white-clad young surgeon sprang up the steps and into the house. He leaned over Kate, and examined her carefully. Then he turned to Herbert.

"Pretty bad fall for a pregnant woman! You're not her husband!"

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Herbert straightened himself up.

"Mr. Bathurst's not here, and he's out of work. You'd better . . ."

The surgeon nodded.

"All right."

He went back to the ambulance; a stretcher was brought, and Kate Bathurst was carried out of her husband's house. . . .

Herbert lingered yet a few minutes in the empty hall, but Bathurst did not reappear. So, at last he went away, heavy-hearted enough, with no such sense of liberation as he had hoped to feel in leaving this house which had grown to be his house of bondage.

The figure of Kate on the stretcher haunted him unendurably. He remembered nothing now of their life together but the brief and rare hours of a more tender union. The old, half-sensual, half-compassionate love of her body came back to him—the poor, pitiful, beautiful body, so broken now, so weak, so abandoned. . . .

He went to the hospital, but they did not admit him. She was very ill, the young woman

in the office informed him. The fall had brought on a miscarriage which threatened serious complications. Being only a friend, he would not be able to see her until she was well on the road to recovery. Would she recover? Oh, undoubtedly! And the young woman looked at him with peculiar interest. . . .

In the meantime he was staying at the little Harlem hotel where the charges were entirely beyond his means, and so once more he had to look for some dwelling. He found a pleasant enough room in the neighbourhood of the University, but that very fact displeased him, since he constantly regretted his lost career and the wayward courses into which his life had fallen. Nevertheless, a strange peace came over him. He could work quietly and take long, restful, solitary walks. The spring was turning into summer, and he spent as much of his time as possible out of doors. The Castles had left town, but now and then he had the happiness of receiving a brief note from Elsa, which heartened him to continue the difficult struggle of life.

Every two or three days he telephoned to the hospital, and heard that Kate was progressing slowly, but satisfactorily. At the end of three weeks the secretary, who had taken a romantic fancy to his friendship for Mrs. Bathurst, told him that on the next Wednesday she could arrange for him to see the patient for half an hour. The latter had, it appeared, asked for his messages, and had always seemed stronger when he had been heard from. This fact touched Herbert to the quick. It was all over, of course; it had been all wrong from the beginning; she must try to make up by fidelity and dutifulness to her husband for her terrible lapse. . . . But she had loved him . . . him. . . .

On Wednesday, with a strange and sweet suspense in his heart, he rode uptown to the hospital. Even its grim walls took on beauty from the gifts of summer, for green creepers covered their nakedness, and a few trees swayed before the stern entrance. Herbert had to wait a while, but finally he was admitted to the convalescent ward and found Kate—thin, white,

frail—propped up on pillows in a large chair. She took the roses that he brought her into her almost transparent hands and laid them in her lap. An exquisite melancholy stole over Herbert at the sight. This was, no doubt, their last sight of each other. She would soon be well. . . . He almost had it in his heart to regret the finality of the occasion.

“Wasn’t it awful,” she said, “that I couldn’t see you in all this time? But then, you didn’t deserve it!”

Her tone was plaintive, and made him feel uncomfortable. In the pathos of the summer and of illness, in the peace and freedom that had come to him, he had not counted on the conflict that might occur between them.

“Don’t let us talk of the past,” he said. “We were foolish and wicked. Now we will have to part, but we will think of each other often—often—and try to be better in the years to come.”

A gentle wind stirred the flowers on her lap, their fragrance floated to him, and he was

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affected by his own words. But Kate sat up, her pale skin drawn tightly over her bones.

"Part, will we?" she laughed so that the attendant nurse turned around. "D'you think *he'd* have me back?"

Herbert felt a cold shiver shake his limbs, as she went on:

"I was so low that I wasn't expected to live. *He* didn't even come!"

"Hasn't he been here at all?"

"Oh, yes, a couple of days ago. He said that of course he could divorce me, and that if I wanted him to he would. He's given up the house and is going away. He didn't seem to care much, either. Or, maybe he was only too stubborn to show it."

"To divorce you?" Herbert echoed. "Did he know?"

"Oh, he didn't know till that day. But when I saw that you were going to desert me, I just got wild, wild. I wanted to rush downstairs, and keep you from going. So he held me by the arm and wouldn't let me go down, and I just —shrieked out the whole truth in his face!"

Herbert sat moveless and silent, overwhelmed by the heaviness of his fate. He stared out at the bitter irony of that radiantly joyous blue sky, that infinitely golden sunlight.

"Of course, if you don't want me, Bertie, I'll go in the street."

She wept weakly, and the nurse came forward to terminate the interview.

"When can I see Mrs. Bathurst again?"
Herbert stammered.

The nurse regarded him sternly.

"You will find out at the office, but you mustn't excite her again!"

He left the building slowly. Where his heart should have been he felt something like a lump of ice. He felt weak and a little sick at his stomach, and went into a near apothecary's shop to take a cooling drink. Then, suddenly, fear shook him, fear of the future, fear of life itself. He tried to be calm, and to analyse his feelings toward Kate. No, he did not love her. He did not even any longer desire her. What was worse, she represented to him all the ignobler, all the disintegrating elements of his

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life. And there floated into his mind another image, gracious, pure and beneficent—the perfect lady of his soul. But to think in that strain was useless, useless! He might as well content himself with moral misery and impotence. To that fate he had doomed himself.

Then his mood changed once more, and he thought of flight. But he could not hide in New York, for Kate knew who his employers were, and he could not be breadless. He had no money with which to leave the city, nor could he go home. He would not go home with a lie upon his lips, and, if he told the truth, his father would sternly command him to marry the woman with whom he had sinned.

He went back to his room, and brooded dully on the incidents of the afternoon. An hour passed and another, and he could see no way of escape. Then that curious quality of spiritual readjustment that saves life while it destroys, asserted itself in him. He tried to picture a common life with Kate, unhindered and untrammelled, and he found a grain of comfort in the reflection. He would have a home,

at least, and the feeling of the utter homelessness of New York had never left him. But he was angry with himself at the very acquiescence in his fate which finally came over him. He delayed another day and yet another, till a note came from Kate telling him that she would have to leave the hospital in a day or two. They had never before communicated by writing, and he was shocked, foolishly perhaps, and disproportionately, by the illiteracy of her writing. But he went at once. There was nothing else to be done.

She looked better to-day. A faint flush was in her cheeks, and her demeanour was more animated. Her talk was quite business-like.

“Have you looked for rooms, Bertie?”

Her matter-of-course air irritated him.

“Certainly not!”

She opened her eyes in astonishment.

“Well, you’d better do it to-day. Just get a little flat. Of course, we have to have furniture.”

“I have no money,” he said coldly.

“Never mind, it doesn’t take much. All you

have to do is to make a first payment at one of the installment houses. My sister sent me some money when she heard I was ill and in trouble."

She pulled a little wad of bills of a small denomination from her stocking.

"If only I could go and help select the things. But if I'm well enough to go out, they won't take me back." She sighed. "What can we do?"

"We might stay in a cheap hotel for a day or two . . ."

"Yes, that's so. But you must get a flat. How much can we pay?"

The "we" was a revelation to him; it stung him, he didn't know why, beyond endurance.

"Twenty dollars, at the utmost."

Again she sighed.

"We can't get much for that. Try to get a three-room flat in a decent house, not four rooms in some awfully cheap place."

He nodded helplessly.

"Let's see," she went on. "To-day is Monday. I've got to leave on Wednesday. You'll be here?"

"Yes . . ."

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He turned away from her for a minute. Something within him struggled like a caged bird, some terrible eagle beating its wings against the pitiless bars in vain.

“Kate . . .”

“Well!”

“What’s to become of us!”

She looked at him strangely.

“Why, I don’t know what you mean!”

The struggle in him ceased. A dull apathy took its place. What was the use of protest? No protest reached her soul. To her it was the most natural thing in the world to appropriate the man to whom—through the urge of her own evil passions—she had given her body. He was her natural prey. If you tried to make her mind transcend that view—the accepted canon of the modern *petite bourgeoisie*—it simply didn’t react. It was like applying a delicate surgeon’s knife to a brick wall.

“I’ll try to get the flat,” Herbert said, wearily, “and come for you on Wednesday.”

She was satisfied with his consent, and a little

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of the business-like hardness faded from her voice. She laid her hand on his.

"We'll be real cosy," she said, "you'll see!"

He nodded. There were no words by which he could communicate with her on that point. Slowly he got up and turned to go. She looked around swiftly to see that no one was observing them.

"Bertie," she said, "won't you kiss me?"

He bent over her and straightened up, paler than before. Her kiss had not been the kiss of a mistress, but the unimpassioned kiss of the usual wife. . . .

Herbert found flat-hunting, especially in his present mood, a discouraging occupation. The prices in all the houses whose appearance pleased him were prohibitive. He climbed innumerable stairs, rode up and down on elevators, interviewed all the tribe of janitors and janitresses, who always began by being excessively cordial, and ended by being excessively contemptuous or even openly insolent. Evening found him as far from the accomplishment of his mission as ever. But he was too tired,

too hungry, too overwhelmed by the turn that his fate had taken to be really troubled. His capacity for feeling seemed, for the moment, exhausted. In a fit of mere perversity he went, without any real desire, to a theatre and gave himself up to the external stimulus. On coming out into the night air a keen sense of the situation in which he found himself threatened to overtake him. He went into a bar-room and drank two or three glasses of whiskey, a thing entirely unwonted with him. But he felt that he wanted peace for a few more hours. When he went out into the air the raw spirits affected him violently. The street-lamps danced before his eyes; he felt light and free and joyous, as if he could have floated, wingless, over the earth. He didn't know exactly how he ever got to bed; but the surcease of thought that he had desired, had been his. . . .

Next morning he got up with an aching head, but a certain stolidity of temper that was new to him. He abandoned his work for the day and started, in a more systematic manner, the search for a flat. He went intentionally to

poorer neighbourhoods than the one in which he lived. It was a weary business again, and he finally paid a deposit on a four-room "telescope" flat on Bradhurst Avenue. The house seemed clean and decent, and since the lot next to it was not yet occupied by any building, the little rooms (all running into each other) were bright enough in the summer light. He was glad that this task was completed, and went back to his room to work. The days, however few, at the hotel, would probably take all his little savings, and it behooved him to work. . . .

On Wednesday he went to the hospital, and found Kate singularly alert and strong.

"Just think of it," she said, "he didn't even send me all my clothes."

Herbert did not fail to take the hint.

"I'll try to get you what you need."

"And did you get a flat, dear?"

He told her that he had taken one. She was inexhaustible in questions concerning it. He soon discovered that there were a thousand-and-

one necessary qualifications of a flat that he had overlooked.

“Well,” she said, at last, “maybe it will do, for a while, anyhow. We don’t have to stay longer than we want to.”

He took her to the hotel that he had selected, and her spirits seemed to rise. When they came into the lobby, she accompanied him to the desk. He stood over the registration-book with pen poised high. She touched his elbow.

“Why don’t you write? I’d like to go up and lie down.”

He had stood as one dazed. The pen in his hand touched the paper and wrote: Mr. and Mrs. Vincent. He looked at her as if she were some strange being, strange in appearance and in nature. She divined something of his thought, and tears of mortification came to her eyes.

“Bertie, don’t you *want* me?”

He took her arm with something of the old compassionate tenderness and led her upstairs.

XV.

In a few days, days that always, afterward, seemed to Herbert a prolonged nightmare, Kate and he were established on Bradhurst Avenue. They had managed to buy a few rugs, the necessary bedroom furniture and household utensils. In addition, she had insisted on getting a comfortable desk and desk-chair for Herbert. This circumstance touched him, for it had been long since anyone had cared so intimately for his personal comfort. . . . He would sit at his desk in the front room, and look out at the street and hear Kate busy at some household task, and a subtle comfort would steal over him —the sense of being at home, in his own home, no longer quite alone. In the afternoon he and Kate would go out for a time, or oftener in the evening when it was cool. A languor seemed again to have come over her; she talked little;

Herbert followed his own thoughts, and so they passed many days in a dreamful peace.

Clara Earle was their only visitor. She came often, and seemed interested in their life. As to herself, she was reticent, and neither Kate nor Herbert could discover her manner of living or her plans for the future. She had left the flat that she and Dr. Earle had occupied together, and was living in a boarding-house of the better kind. One day Kate ventured to ask her:

“Have you seen Mr. Castle, since his return?”

“Oh, yes; oftener than I’ve wanted to. What’s the use?”

Kate hardly understood this, but Herbert did. He remembered that Castle had told him that Clara was made of finer stuff. She could, no doubt, sink to depths. But there was in her a certain pride. She was, in the true sense, an individual. Herbert glanced at Kate and her whole body, her every gesture, seemed to him to express her essentially parasitic nature. Mrs. Earle rose to go.

"You haven't gone to see the Castles, recently?"

"I've been very busy," he said, lamely.

Clara laughed a little maliciously.

"It would be rather hard to go there, considering. Well, there wouldn't be much use, either."

A few minutes later she left. Herbert sat brooding at the window. He gazed out, but his eyes saw nothing. The voice of Kate roused him from his reverie.

"I didn't know Fred Castle lived with his mother?"

Herbert winced.

"He doesn't!"

"Well, who is it, then? Clara said 'the Castles'!"

For some indefinable reason the words were hard to say.

"He has a sister. They live together."

"Is she young or old?"

"I've never inquired after her age," Herbert replied, curtly.

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"I didn't say you had; but you must have some idea."

He mastered himself with difficulty.

"She's about twenty-seven or eight."

"Oh! . . ."

Kate's tone was low, long drawn out, ironical, and Herbert felt as if he had been struck in the face. He sprang up.

"Kate!"

She laughed an unnatural laugh.

"I see now why you were so crazy to leave the house; I see why you didn't want me when you had disgraced me. I see. You went to that Castle woman and you got all you wanted there, without having to dodge a husband!"

He felt himself growing white.

"If you dare to besmirch that lady's name with another word of your vile talk—I'll kill you, you——"

"Well, what!" she screamed. "Of course, you can insult me all you please. Maybe you'd like to beat me. Andrew was better than that!"

He dropped into a chair. He felt that here was a species of vulgarity that rendered one en-

tirely defenceless. He took up a book and stared, unseeing, at its pages. Then he read and realised, suddenly, that not a word had entered his mind. He tossed the book away, took up his hat and left the house without another look at Kate. Aimlessly, he wandered from street to street. The figure of Elsa Castle shone before his mind's eye like that of some saint. He would never see her again. He was for ever unworthy, for he had had to stand idly by and hear mud flung at her who was most spotless. He couldn't make up his mind to go home, and ate dinner at a cheap restaurant. Then he wandered about again in the breathless heat of the vast summer night, half-stunned by the passionate storm in his own soul. Late, very late, when his feet began to ache and his head to grow sick for sleep, he let himself into the flat. He was amazed to find a light in it. Kate sat in the front room with one of her paper-bound novels. She looked up at him quietly.

“Do you know, Bertie, that you rushed out and left me without a cent, to-day?”

He felt at once that he had been a brute.

“And haven’t you had anything?”

“Not much. But it’s too hot to eat.”

“I’ll go out and try to get you something, if you wish.”

“Never mind,” she said, sadly. “You don’t love me, and I don’t much care what happens.”

He went a step nearer to her. The male sense of possession came over him strongly—the sense anciently acquired when man hunted and captured and held woman. She was his, and his thoughtlessness had been cruel. Also, she was gentle and submissive now. He laid his hand lightly on her hair.

“Poor Kate! . . .”

She put her arms around him.

“I’ve been lonesome for you, Bertie.”

“Have you, really?” he asked, drinking in the poison of her subtle flattery. “Let’s go to bed . . .”

But the lull was only temporary. The romance and danger of their prior relations were at an end. Bathurst was not heard from. And Mrs. Earle’s words had distilled a quiver-

ing something into Kate, a wild, insane jealousy of Elsa Castle, that gave her no rest. At the slightest provocation—whatever its kind, however ~~infinitely~~ removed from the subject—she flung ~~friendship~~ for Miss Castle at him with every refinement of vulgar cruelty. The more she saw him suffer under these attacks, the more bitterly she hated the unknown woman and the more rancorous grew her speech. That Elsa was the last rag of an ideal to which the wretched boy's soul was desperately clinging—how could she understand that? To her vision there was but one thing possible: a rival mistress with a subtler power to intoxicate the weary senses.

And, considering the conditions of their life, their quarrels, which grew more and more frequent, arose never from anything that was not sordid and ignoble. Kate was exercised over her wardrobe, and Herbert, though he was perfectly willing to provide for her according to his means, even to deny himself, was constantly shocked at her lack of delicacy and reserve, at the quiet effrontery of her assumptions. He

tried to reason with himself, to tell himself that the secular economic subjection of woman had inevitably induced this frank claim upon the other sex. But reasoning was futile. He blushed and tingled daily for her lack of pride and of dignity. He remembered that when he was a youth at college he had often hesitated to remind his own father and mother of his needs, but had waited for these to be discovered. The worst of it was, that she mistook his attitude for avarice and asked him how much he had to spend on Miss Castle.

The question of a new summer costume presented itself.

"I haven't a thing to wear," Kate said complainingly.

Nervously he tightened his hold of his pen-holder.

"I'm sorry, Kate. How much do you need?"

"Oh, I don't know. About twenty dollars, I guess."

"I'll try to give it to you next week."

"Next week! Oh, I thought I might have it to-day!"

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He turned around.

"You know well enough that that's impossible, Kate."

"Oh, I didn't know."

The slow but inevitable consequence of such scenes was that he prolonged his working hours, that he took commissions at which his pride revolted, that he translated from languages with which he was imperfectly acquainted, that—in a word—he more or less bartered his professional self-respect at the call of Kate's necessities. Once, in a moment of anger, he reproached her with that fact, but there was no aim for that arrow to reach.

"Why, I don't see," said Kate, half tearfully, "that it matters for whom you work. One man's money is as good as another's."

He tried to escape at times by taking long, lonely rambles. But for these, too, he had to pay. On his return home he would find Kate sullen and peevish and consciously disagreeable. She insisted that he must strive to get away from her to meet his other love. The difficulty was increased—he knew at once that it

would be—when one day he met Elsa Castle. She stretched out her hand to him.

“You have become a stranger.”

He felt that he could neither lie nor take refuge in some insincere conventionality under the light of those pure eyes.

“I should like to see you at times, Miss Castle; but it is as impossible as it would be useless. There are circumstances in my life that make it impossible.”

She walked beside him in silence. At last she spoke.

“Then I am not to see you again?”

“I don’t know,” he said, and his voice broke. “I haven’t given up all hope . . .”

She turned away from him, genuinely sorry, he thought, and walked slowly down the street. . . .

He came home later than usual, and saw at once that Kate was enraged.

“Did you have a nice time with your lady-love?”

She had repeated the form of words before, but this time he grew white with anger.

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“Oh, I see you have!”

He sprang up.

“What if I have seen the lady whom you dare to insult? How does it concern you?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Don’t it, though! Well, I think I’ll go and ask her whether it concerns me or not. I guess she don’t know about me.”

Her tone was quiet and determined now. His anger, too, calmed absolutely, and he looked at her with coldly scrutinising eyes.

“I don’t know what depth of infamy you may be capable of; but if you attempt, in any way, to communicate with Miss Castle, who is a friend, merely a friend of mine—if your mind can take that in—I say that should you approach her in any way, our relations would end at once. It’s useless for you to tell me that I owe you a duty. There are circumstances under which I would acknowledge no duty.”

“All right, then. If you have a mistress, I’ll have a lover.”

He didn’t reply to her remark, for a thought, monstrous in its subtlety, its cruelty, its

strangeness, came over him. If she were to make good *her* threat, if she were to be untrue to him—he would be free. He sat down at his desk and leaned his head upon his crossed arms. Dear God, was it possible for man to fall so low, *so* low? Tears of remorse over his wasted youth and distorted soul came into his mind. He prayed to be saved from the promptings of his own heart, from the world and the flesh that enslave us and warp us utterly and for ever. . . .

It was easy enough to deplore his fallen condition; it was not at all easy to shake off the terrible idea. That remained and gained force, and drove him out to aimless wanderings in order that Kate's anger might be the more aroused. He fought against this obsession as valiantly as he could, but in the depths of consciousness it was always present; it governed his whole life. It seemed to him at this time that without the base hope he harboured he could not have lived. The first feeling of pride in the home that was his had passed, every element that made the situation bearable had

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passed, and he and Kate looked at each other with cold and watchful eyes.

A day came on which she flared up with a more definite violence.

"If you don't want to support me, I guess I can get some work to do myself."

He was too weary for anger.

"As you please. I give you all I have to give."

"It's mighty little, heaven knows."

And for the rest of the day she went about the house in a pointedly insolent manner. Herbert, his day's work over, swallowed a few mouthfuls of dinner and went out. He took the Elevated Railroad and went downtown. He loved to lose himself in the life and movement of the lower city. The sight, too, of conditions materially more cruel than his own, gave his nerves a strangely satisfying sensation. He was deeply compassionate, but what he saw fed his growing sense of all the evil and the wrong that lives under the sun.

On the Bowery near Eighth Street, he felt a light tap on his shoulder. He turned and saw

a round, hard face with two large, expressionless eyes.

“Lucy!”

“Hallo, Bertie!”

“What are you doing here?”

She laughed.

“What d’you suppose?”

The last vestige of her youth had gone. Not that she looked more than her age, but the freshness of her body had been steeped too long in the sink of the city’s vice. Her speech, her gestures, everything about her had taken on a coarse despair.

“So your drummer didn’t stay with you?”

“It wasn’t him you met. I just took in a man to spite you. Gee! I was mad at you. An’ it was a dirty trick not to come sooner.”

He shrugged his shoulders. Speech was quite useless. It seemed to him that either the whole social order must be reversed or that this claim of every woman a man touched upon his whole life must be madness. Individual responsibility there could be none. He saw her lick her lips in the old, remembered way.

“Are you thirsty?” he asked.

“Betcher life! Ain’t it boiling hot?”

He nodded.

“Where can we go?”

“I’ll show you.”

She led the way for a block or two and took him into a low, smoky hall, filled with round wooden tables. At the far end, on a tiny stage, a large woman, in an excessively low-cut dress and a skirt that barely touched her knees, was singing in a raucous voice to the accompaniment of a tinny piano. Most of the tables were occupied by fat, stolid-looking men who drank beer and puffed out the acrid odour of cheap cigars. Lucy and Herbert took seats at a vacant table and Herbert ordered beer.

“I don’t come here often,” Lucy explained, half-apologetically, “the men are pretty low. They ask you to do things . . .”

He looked at her.

“My God, Lucy, can’t you get out of it?”

She drained the glass that the waiter had brought.

“Hell!” A dry sob, instantly suppressed,

wrenched her throat. "How d'you suppose I could get out? Who'd have me? I tried to get a place in a store, 'cause my health ain't very good, and the floor-walker called me a——"

"Never mind what," Herbert broke in. "You say you're not very well?"

She shook her head.

"I often have pains right here," she touched her side. "The fact is, Bertie, I'm down and out, and I haven't been able to do much lately. Could you lend me a quarter?"

A sharp pain went through him. He felt for a moment as if he must perish of his impotence to rise and shatter a world where such things could be. He took out a five-dollar bill, the last he had, and put it into her hand. She looked at it curiously.

"I'd rather not take that much. I ain't a bit well, and you couldn't"

"Hush," he half-sobbed, "I don't want anything in return."

A little while afterward they separated. She told him that the money would give her a few days of complete rest during which her physical

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condition might improve. But no comfort came to his heart. The terror and the misery that he had seen, bored like a worm in his brain. When he came home he looked with contempt at Kate in her soft sleep. She might well drop her lofty pretensions, her exorbitant, unblushing demands. An accident of fortune, and she might have walked the weary flags of the Bowery by night. He was not sure that Lucy was not a kindlier force in the grim order of the universe. . . .

PART FOUR

XVI

THE summer waned with a haunting gradualness; no crisis of any kind came into the life that Kate and Herbert led. And it was this absence of any perceptible violence, of any possible turning-point, that made the man come as near an abdication of all hope as one can possibly come at his age. He feared the complete mastery of habit, of a habit so rooted that the rebellious power becomes atrophied until there is no escape but death. He went through the same routine of living day after day, seeing hardly anyone, reading but little. And, since Kate was fairly willing and competent in her housekeeping, life became, in a sense, effortless. It was at rarer and rarer intervals that the impassioned energy of soul that had once been his, leaped forth.

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Thus he grew unobservant, and failed wholly to note that a quiet change was coming over Kate. She was less insistent upon his presence; she was more taciturn; she went out oftener to call on Clara Earle; she seemed, in some slow way, to be grasping out after something—herself not clearly, perhaps, knowing what. She spent days upon days downtown shopping, with a small sum that Herbert had given her, and finally came back with the result of all this expenditure of time and strength—a single tailor-made suit. She put it on, and asked his approval of its perfect fit, which he willingly gave.

“I’m thinner than I used to be,” she said. “I don’t think I’ve had such a good figure in years.”

He looked at her more closely and saw that she spoke the truth. Her figure was excellent; her complexion and her eyes had recovered all their brilliance; her hair was glossy and charmingly arranged. A shadow of the old freshness of physical stimulus came over him.

“You do look well, Kate!”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Much you care!”

The gesture and the words stung him. She stood before him, fresh-looking, with the peculiar fragrance of the well-groomed woman. He sprang up and put his arms about her.

“Kate . . .”

For the first time, she repulsed him.

“If *that’s* all I’m good for . . .”

His arms dropped at his side. In the innermost depth of his consciousness sprang up, in answer to her violence, the phrase: “Thou sayest it.” Then remorse struck him at such a thought concerning any human soul. He turned away from her and involuntarily analysed her as he knew her. Bit by bit the relentless process of thought went on. He could not find one action of hers, one thought, one word, one gesture, that was not actuated by that single primal instinct of her nature. Desperately he sought for some impersonal interest, some pure ambition, some strain, however slight, of mental disinterestedness. He could find none. She had a nimbler wit than Lucy, a more slothful nature.

Less of a savage, she looked ahead and guarded against the final social crimes. Otherwise, there was no difference between the two women. And, from this point of view, he now began to watch her, and with cruel persistence to mark the utter sexuality of her life. His moral nature, enervated, warped, slow to move though it had become, revolted at this new perception. The compassion that he had so often experienced for her faded. The sense, common to all men, of the weakness of woman and of the necessity of protecting her—this, too, deserted him. On the contrary, he marvelled at the energy that sprang in her from such singleness of aim and singleness of impulse. Beside it, with his varying instincts, his manifold ambitions, his lack of overwhelming intensity at any one point, he felt himself necessarily the weaker, inevitably the conquered. . . .

Early in September came the result of all Kate's mysterious doings which, latterly, Herbert had not failed to notice. They were sitting at dinner in their little flat, when Kate announced, calmly:

"I'm going to work!"

He did not at once catch the full significance of her words.

"To work? On what?"

"Not on any particular thing," she said, impatiently. "Clara got me a position in a store."

She mentioned the name of one of the great department shops.

"I never thought I'd have to go out to work."

He felt keenly the slur upon himself, that the words conveyed.

"I see no necessity for it, now."

"Well, I do. I can't have any clothes; we can't live in a decent place; we can't have anything. I thought it would be so different!"

He flashed out.

"And do you suppose that I would use *your* money?"

The judgement on her which his question held, passed clean over her head.

"Why shouldn't you?" she said, relentlessly. "Anyhow, you give me what you can."

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He paid no attention to words, lost in his own thought.

"So you will be at work all day?"

"M-hm." She nodded. "I won't have to start at the bottom, though. I'll get twelve dollars a week, and more pretty soon. The floor-walker, Mr. Emery, thinks I ought to do well. I'm not a green girl."

Herbert sat up straight.

"In that case," he said, slowly, "I don't see why we should live together any longer."

She fixed an intense gaze on him.

"You don't? Well, I was good enough for you before. When you took me away from my husband you even told me you loved me."

Her effrontery shocked him.

"I took you from your husband?"

But her sincerity was, obviously, perfect.

"Of course, you did. I didn't offer myself to you."

"No, but . . ."

"Well, then——" Her tone was full of the satisfaction of someone who has proven his case. Protest was useless.

On the following Monday morning she set out at half-past seven, to go to her work. She prepared breakfast as usual and Herbert, in silent recognition of the action, arose at an earlier hour than usual and shared her meal. She was merry of mood, but he could force himself to no responsiveness. He was silently speculating on the effect that her going would have upon him and upon their common life. Finally, she kissed him and went, with elastic steps, out of the flat.

He sat still in his place, and let wave after wave of silence roll over him. He realised suddenly that the whole day was his, free of interruptions, of questions, of annoyance, of worry, of all the varied emotions (each slight, but in the mass infinitely wearing) with which Kate inspired him. A very strange feeling overtook him, an emotion of quivering poignancy. Tears rose, involuntarily, into his eyes. It was not only the sense of personal freedom; it was the consciousness of liberation from the devouring sexuality which Kate's very presence exhaled. He went to the window and the sunshine seemed to him of a crystalline purity;

the waving of a tree against the sky struck him as a strange symbol of secret and beautiful things. The whole world looked clean. . . .

He did his daily stint of routine work swiftly and easily. Then he went out and the atmosphere of autumn stole exquisitely into his heart. Thoughts long unwonted came to him; ambitions long forgotten cried for a renewal of life. In the purple glow of dusk, dressed with starry lamps, he went back to the flat. He lit no light, but sat in the semi-darkness with a strange sense of spiritual exhilaration. When, toward seven, he heard Kate's step in the hall, he sighed deeply but patiently, like one determined to be brave during the hours when an accustomed burden returns.

She was brightly voluble, though a little tired. "The worst of it is," she said, "that you have to stand up all day. Of course, they pretend that you can sit down when you're not waiting on some customer. But, Lord! you can't, really. Because, if the floor-walker sees you sitting, he'll come up and say: 'Is there nothing

for you to do, Miss So-and-so?" Still, Mr. Emery is very nice to me."

A grim thought came into Herbert's mind. He would use her own tactics for a moment. He really didn't care how attentive the floor-walker might be. The complete possibilities of her corruption were a sealed book to him.

"This Mr. Emery seems altogether too kind to you," he said, smiling.

She looked him full in the eyes.

"What do you take me for, Bertie? I'm living with you because I love you."

She went to bed very early, pleading that she must get up sooner than she had done that morning, and Herbert, alone in the front room for the evening, began to write a little story and worked late into the night.

For some time hints for creative work had subtly flowed into his mind. To do such work had once been all his hope. But he had not seen his way clear. Now the varied experiences that he had had in New York crystallised at a point here, at another there, and from these points of crystallisation sprang ideas of an un-

usual roundedness. . . . He scarcely noted Kate's comings and goings, for he was working out the lessons he had won from life in the form of art. And, at the same time, he had to do the work by which they lived. Not many days passed and the story was finished. Hesitatingly, he sent it out to seek its little fortune in the world; hesitatingly, for he set all his hope upon it. If he could write after all, the wretchedness and degradation had not been quite in vain.

One afternoon, to his intense surprise, Mrs. Earle came in. She asked after Kate.

"Why, Kate's at the store, downtown," he said, slowly.

Mrs. Earle opened her black eyes wide.

"At the store? Downtown? What do you mean?"

Herbert turned pale. He was beyond discretion at this moment.

"I understood that it was you who helped her procure her position."

The woman shook her head slowly.

"You must have misunderstood her."

He looked steadily at her.

"I did *not* misunderstand."

She looked thoughtful.

"Well, what did you expect? Poor Kate! She thought life with you would be so different!"

"Hasn't it?" he flashed out. "As between Bathurst and myself, the difference is, without vanity, pretty obvious."

Mrs. Earle laughed.

"Rot! Fancy Kate knowing that! She thought she'd have a fine time like me—going about in swell clothes to theatres, restaurants. She thought you were the kind of man that makes money and spends it, too."

"And is that all?"

She laughed bitterly.

"That's about all. What's the use of living, if you can't get some amusement out of life? And Kate and I want the things that amuse us, just as you and Fred want the things that amuse you."

"There may be a difference in the things," he said, rudely.

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"Of course, I've heard that talk before. It doesn't go down. Who is to judge between us?" She sprang up and pirouetted about the room with a movement of infinite grace and abandonment. "Tra-la-la, tra-la-la! Life is a rotten business—rotten. We've got to have some fun."

He regarded her gravely.

"What are you going to do with your life?"

"Oh, I don't know yet. I'm thinking, thinking. Maybe I'll go on the stage; maybe I'll open a house"

She left Herbert in a puzzled state of mind. He had not suspected Kate of deceit; indeed, the notion had never presented itself. Now it came in the nature of a blow, yet the blow was muffled by his increasing carelessness of her, and by the shy new forces that were working in his own mind. In a moment, however, he had repudiated this attitude as an unmanly one. He was living with the woman; rightly or wrongly, she was using his name. He was united to her by many ties, not of the highest or best kind, but of a kind that had always proven itself

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potent in human relationships. Thus, too, certain rights were his—the right to truth, above all.

When Kate came in that evening, he met her with a grave face.

“Mrs. Earle was here to-day.”

She laughed.

“Does she want to make love to you, too?”

“Hardly.”

“Then why did she come? She knew I was downtown.”

Again he marvelled at her effrontery. This time it had carried her beyond the mark.

“She did not know that,” he said, quietly. “In fact, she knew nothing of your new departure. So, of course, it was not she who got you your position.”

Kate grew white, a pasty, unwholesome white.

“How far are you deceiving me?” he asked.

She burst into angry tears.

“I’m not deceiving you at all. If you want to believe that woman’s lies, you can. But I

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suppose you'll take her word before mine. She's nothing but a nasty, low——”

He interrupted her.

“She was quite sincere and quite friendly toward you. And you've given yourself away sufficiently.”

She tossed her head.

“You can believe what you please. I see what's happened, though. Clara's a good-looking woman, and she's got no shame. But you needn't have carried on in my house, anyhow.”

He turned away, as so often before, in despair—not because he loved her, but because he knew that he could not make her understand. The weapon of sexual suspicion was her unfailing source of defence, and she used it with the highest degree of effectiveness. Since it was impossible to disprove her accusations, they gave her an immediate and cheap triumph. This fact she evidently knew, and she used her knowledge with great regularity.

The next day he went downtown, visiting various offices by which he was employed. He had a rather successful morning, collecting sev-

eral bills and procuring several commissions. Hence, he went to take luncheon at the "Bristol," a moderately elegant chop-house on Sixth Avenue. Rows of palms divided the place into aisles, and he took his seat at a table that stood against the central row of palms. He gave his order and then looked about. Beyond the greenery he saw, unmistakably, the smooth head of Kate. She was bending across a table toward a large, dark man, heavy-jawed, a trifle bald, wearing an aggressive moustache of coarse, straight hair. The man breathed heavily and his eyes—in which Herbert could imagine at once the business-like hardness of other moments—glimmered upon Kate voluptuously. . . .

Herbert bit his lip. The moment of his liberation had come, and it wasn't a pleasant moment, after all. He couldn't shake off, by any mental effort, the desire, the folly of which he recognised at once, to get up and commit personal violence upon the sleek Mr. Emery. The primitive manhood in him cried out for that last tribute. A red mist swam before his eyes, the

mist of a furious physical jealousy. But he forced himself to be inactive. If he smote the man he simply made himself ridiculous and reassumed the burden of Kate. . . . He paid his score, and, without another look, slunk out of the restaurant.

On the street he felt a vague self-contempt, but in the moment of decision in the restaurant he had quite counted on feeling that, and his experiences of the last year had rendered him inordinately suspicious of both the righteousness and the intelligence of the inherited instincts that dominate the majority of men. No doubt, according to any code of honour, he should be thirsting for revenge. But then, according to that same code, the anger and jealousy that were piercing him with undeniable stabs were worthy and natural emotions. Natural they might be, but worthy! He laughed to himself. For, in the spiritual sense, in the only sense that ought to count to man, as distinguished from the beast, what was Kate to him or he to Kate? Her body, of which at the moment his instinctive jealousy was so furious,

didn't concern him. If he wanted to be a pig—he was morally certain that he would never wish to be again—he could purchase all that *that* could give him.

In a word, he had settled his account with all the current notions of social morality. He had seen too much, lived through too much, to take them seriously, or to take seriously those feelings which generations of worthy, conventional people had left in his blood and brain. There was nothing in the world for him any more but the light of the spirit. When this fierce ancestral struggle in his breast was over, he would look upon Kate as one dead—dead as all creatures must be who, however violent the heat of the native blood, yield to the corruptible which cannot put on incorruption, love the dis-honour which can never know the light of Heaven. . . .

XVII

But the flat, when he got back to it, looked inhumanly lonesome. The last tie was broken, the last disillusion endured, and into the dim little rooms crept haunting shadows. It occurred to him that, of course, he was ignorant of the degree of Kate's intimacy with Emery; of its essential nature there could be no doubt. He lit his study-lamp and gazed, blankly, at the blotter on his desk. A sudden sense of the strangeness of life came over him, of its contradictions, of our helplessness amid the giant forces—dim, invisible, velvet-footed—that rend us unawares. He felt a pitying wonder at the lives of nearly all the men and women that he had ever known. So few had wrought out for themselves any spiritual clarity. For this he saw—and it was the strangest thing to him and the cruellest, in all this mighty scheme that has

us in its fangs—that only he who has gone down the steep way to hell can discern the glimmering reaches of the stairs of heaven. He remembered all the phrases concerning life which he had heard in the home of his childhood, and each was true, and yet each was but a hollow mockery. For the men who spoke them had not made the descent into Avernus, and their voices had no power to convince, no sweetness to persuade, no strength to hold back, but were as the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal. He had come back to all the moral values—not the intellectual ones—that they honoured, but by what ways! It seemed to him that he had a new interpretation for the divine words uttered of old. *That* was the essential moral mystery of life; man must die to the spirit in order to be born again unto the spirit; sin is the womb of righteousness, the mother of glory, the darkness from which springs the light of transfiguration. . . .

Kate came in only a little later than the usual hour, and, involuntarily, his heart knew a pang. But he had determined to speak no word. He

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had no right to her, since he did not love her, as, indeed, we have no right to anything that we do not love. He could not help her, for, in his sense, she was beyond help, had been made without the capacity of being helped. And, furthermore, he knew now that those things that were truly his would never be taken from him, but only the accidents upon which, alas! we also for a period set our foolish hearts.

And yet it was a sharp trial for his unregenerate humanity to sit opposite her at table, and hear her talk, and see her preen herself in the consciousness—of course, she thought him quite ignorant—that a new and very splendid animal of the other sex had set out on the immemorial hunt after her, the desirable. Thus, he was necessarily silent and curt in his replies, but she hardly noted it. Nor did she object to his returning to his desk immediately after the meal, for she had lately spent her evenings in massaging and manicuring herself, in brushing her hair and anointing her limbs in order to give to her whole personality that gloss which New York requires in a desirable woman.

She went to bed; she arose; she went to her work; day followed day, and no very perceptible change took place in the state of affairs. Herbert received a friendly letter from a prominent magazine, saying that his story had been accepted for publication. The editor, holding out promise of moderately generous payment, asked for more stories of the same general character, and Herbert, feeling that he could supply the demand with work of an even happier and more rounded nature, set half-feverishly, half-joyously, to work. It was not, humanly speaking, possible for him to hide this fact from Kate. When, finally, he did announce it, she turned on him her slow, polished-looking eyes.

“There’s a lot of money in being an author, I suppose?”

“Not so very much,” he replied, “but it’s the real thing; it’s what I’ve been trying to do all along.”

“Oh, yes; isn’t that nice?”

He observed that she had even adopted the mincing manner common to the elegance of certain pinchbeck circles in New York.

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"The editor of the *Secular Review*," he added, however, "has promised to take as many stories as I can give him."

She looked up quickly.

"Then we could move into a nicer flat, couldn't we?"

"Not so quick," he said, gravely. "After all, it may be a mere flash in the pan."

Her interest in the matter died down with shameful immediacy. He saw at once that her mind moved on to other and now nearer interests, and his anger found expression for the first time.

"Is it Mr. Emery who engrosses all your thoughts?"

She flushed.

"Oh, he's not so much!"

But there was an odd quaver in her voice and Herbert could not, for the life of him, help pursuing his advantage.

"At all events, your luncheons with him must be pleasant!"

She had mastered fear and hesitancy, and looked up boldly.

“Why shouldn’t he treat me?”

It didn’t occur to her to ask how he knew, but all that evening Herbert saw that she was thinking and planning, and that his chance remark had startled some new element in the situation which involved her. That development, or some consequence of it, showed itself upon the next day. Sunset came, the lamps sowed the city with their jewelled glory, and Kate did not come home. She had never been really late before, and Herbert felt that a crisis was at hand. He determined to wait for her and sat hour after hour at his desk. The heavens clouded, the stars disappeared and a light, cool, sprinkling rain of autumn set in. Herbert leaned back, tired of writing, and looked at his watch. It was twelve o’clock. He lit a cigarette, and another and still another, and yet she did not come. . . .

It was not until after two that he heard her timidly turning the key in the door that led directly into the parlour. Immediately he lit all the three jets of gas on the tawdry chandelier—he had been sitting by the light of a

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study-lamp—and then sat down again. She came in, vividly and exquisitely alive. Drops of sparkling rain adhered to her glossy hair. Her whole personality breathed pleasure, abandon, fullness of life and yet a subtle weariness. With a sharp pang, Herbert felt that she had not attracted him so keenly in many days. Coming from the arms of another man, she seemed desirable to him. He sprang up, stung by the treachery of his own nature.

“Had you not better go back to the man with whom you’ve been?”

She grew white, but her mouth was heavy with sullenness.

“I could. He asked me to stay. You don’t care, anyhow.”

He raised his arm, and she cowered before him.

“You better not; you’ve got no right; we’re not married!”

His arm fell. Moral restraint she knew none, and the inherited respect for the official institution of marriage which had made her, at least, fear her husband—that, too, failed now.

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With an immense effort, Herbert controlled himself. He turned away, and waited until she had gone into the bedroom. Then he took off his outer garments and lay down on the couch in the parlour. To-morrow he would be free—for ever. . . .

Strangely enough, though, on the morrow he lingered. He supposed that he ought really to break up the little establishment at once. The cheque for his first story made such a move quite easily possible. But, wrapped in a half-dreamy haze of memory, reflection and regret, he lingered on. Evening came once more, and it seemed strange that he had no one to expect; it seemed lonely, too, and a bit eerie. His long physical intimacy with this woman had bred in him a certain need of her presence. Again a shadow of the old compassion came back for her who was so unworthy and, almost unconsciously, he caught himself waiting for her step upon the stair. But that step did not come. He waited till the dawn stole, with its fair and gradual feet, up the sky. She was not there. He tossed his last cigarette out into the glim-

mering street, and turned from the window at which he had been watching. The long desired moment had come. He was free to live for all that had seemed fair to him so long, liberated from the trammels of the life of the flesh—and there was sorrow in his heart. . . . So, in a universe where no certain divine voice speaks to us, where the Eternal Father has hidden His face, so do we, in our enduring loneliness, cling to all that seems to shut out the awful void; thus do we see our burdens go with a haunting regret, and sorrow itself cannot go from us and leave us tearless. . . .

He went into the bedroom and touched gently a silk kimono that hung there, a pin-cushion, and a bit of ribbon. Then, sleepless and strangely moved, he went out into the dawn. . . .

Herbert remained for a little time in the strangely empty flat on Bradhurst Avenue and, evening after evening, felt a faint, foolish fluttering of the heart at the hour when Kate had been used to return to him. But the emotion was so gentle that he could quietly take it to

pieces and wonder at it, and let it teach him several things regarding that mixture of habit, physical ease and enforced companionship which the world is content to regard as marital love. At the end of a week, however, having explored to the full all of the emotional experience of the situation, he sent back to the shop whence they had come, the furnishings of the flat, handed the key of the little dwelling to the janitress, and walked thoughtfully over to some pleasant rooms that he had taken in the University neighbourhood.

On the way he met Castle, whom he had not seen in many months. The older man looked out of health and out of spirits, but was glad, as always, to see Herbert.

"You haven't come near us in—how long?"

Herbert smiled.

"I will now, if I may. Many things have changed—"

"Yes, I saw your story in the *Secular*."

"Oh, there are other things."

"For instance?"

"Kate has left me"

Castle whistled softly.

“With anybody?”

Herbert flushed involuntarily.

“A cad—big and vulgar—but, no doubt, with money.”

Castle shrugged his shoulders.

“It’s your good fortune. And yet, didn’t you feel sorry?”

Herbert nodded, seeing himself understood.

“In a way. It’s the force of habit, I suppose. I still feel lonesome, especially in the evening.”

Castle nervously tapped the pavement with his cane.

“You know, I rarely see Clara now—and I feel lost. Her—er—acerbity of temper has become frightful. She’s impossible, violent, outrageous. And still . . .”

“I thought she really cared for you!”

“She did, or I thought she did. I’ve done everything one can do; I even—you’ll be surprised to hear—offered to marry her. She told me that the offer came too late, that she would not be put in a position where anyone could

slight her, and that—well, she raged. I understand her, in a way; but I can't express the exact shade of thought that would hit the case."

A chill wind blew, and the two men walked slowly onward, side by side. At last, Castle said:

"I fooled around with Clara for about eight years, and now my occupation's gone." He laughed harshly. "Like Othello's."

"Can't you get a more genuine one?" Herbert asked, lamely.

The other lowered his eyes.

"Too late! Too late for everything—even the love of a light woman." Then he drew himself up. "However, don't let me depress you with my tawdry mopings, but come to see us."

They parted and Herbert, almost involuntarily, found himself strolling in the direction of Clara Earle's boarding-house. The curiosity of the artist was now upon him—impersonal, yet not unkindly. He reached the house in a few minutes, and was admitted to the conventional boarding-house parlour. The room and the house at this hour was quiet and seemed

deserted. The boarders were all downtown, but he was told that Mrs. Earle was in and would see him. He had not long to wait. She came in swiftly, a little less carefully groomed, a little less exquisite than of old. In her brilliant complexion showed, here and there, a tiny spot, not unlike a shadowy freckle, and yet of deeper hue.

"You haven't come to ask me where Kate is?"

He shook his head.

"I can imagine where she is—more or less. I really," he smiled, "came for the pleasure of seeing you."

She didn't respond to his friendliness.

"I guess I gave the poor girl dead away that time I was at your place, but I didn't mean to."

"What does it matter?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I don't think she's done very well for herself. That fellow's got the boodle—but he's a brute."

Herbert frowned.

"Then perhaps she'll respect him as she did Bathurst, and as she never respected me."

Clara half-closed her eyes.

"I'm not so sure that she wasn't dead right. Bathurst took *her* seriously, and so does this fellow. But you clever gentlemen—yes, I mean Fred and you—you're so high and mighty and so damned intellectual and so—what d'you call it—ethical and superior! You make me sick!"

He was not without a sense of the partial truth of her accusation, and so kept silent concerning it.

"Have you seen Kate?" he asked, vaguely.

"Just once; but I guess we'll be real chummy again, some day."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"Oh, yes. You see I haven't money enough to live on, and I don't know how to do anything. So I'm going to open an establishment, a——"

"You?" he broke in.

She flared up at once.

"Don't preach to me! What d'you suppose I'll do—take in washing, or ever look at a beast of a man again—myself?"

She stopped as a maid timidly entered the room.

"There's a lady to see you."

Clara shrugged her shoulders.

“Can’t imagine who it is; but show her in.”

Herbert rose to go, but she detained him.

“Wait; it can’t be anybody that matters.”

In a moment came in an enormous woman, puffing and laced unconscionably. Her cheeks fairly flared with rouge, her lips were an unnatural crimson, her fingers glittered with jewels.

“Mrs. Earle?” she asked, in a voice curiously disproportionate to her figure.

“Yes.”

“I’m Mrs. Emery.”

Clara and Herbert exchanged a glance.

“I didn’t know there was a Mrs. Emery,” Clara said.

The woman bridled and puffed herself out like a huge frog.

“An’ that’s just what I’ve come to let you know. I couldn’t find Emery and that low hussy; but I heard that you were a friend of hers.”

Clara scowled heavily.

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"You can't abuse Mrs. Bathurst to me, and I don't know where she is."

The woman got up.

"It don't matter. Emery can't leave his job, and I'll track 'em yet. Then I'll make that thing look green. He always comes back to me."

At the last words she simpered grotesquely, then drew herself up again and strode majestically from the room.

"Didn't I tell you that Kate would come to me?"

Clara smiled grimly as she saw the pain in his face.

"My God!" he stammered.

"Would you take her back to save her?" she asked.

He got up heavily.

"I have to save myself," he said. "There's a good deal more in that attitude than we think, usually."

She held out her hand to him.

"Good-by. I guess we won't see each other again, very soon."

He took the proffered hand, speechless. What was there to say? He went from her presence out into the grey streets of the city, reflecting upon this woman who was not wholly evil, but who was deliberately setting out upon the road of utter destruction, not to be saved again, perhaps, for ever.

XVIII

FROM many hours of reflection it became evident to Herbert that he must leave New York. The city did not offer him that quietude which his new order of work required, and too many of its streets and squares were strange little graveyards of the heart to him, graveyards, too, of so many fragments of his lost youth. He was a man now, full of a sad experience of life, and wise enough not to desire to resuscitate that experience constantly by troubling memories. Furthermore, he felt quite sure that he could bear the conditions of his childhood's home with patience now, and even with a kind of calm and happy acquiescence, and that the raw days when he had made it his business to clash with his father on matters of faith were definitely over. Not feverishly, but quietly and thoughtfully he made all necessary preparations to go, visit-

ing various publishing houses and editors who assured him of their continued desire for his work, wherever he might be; and with a kind of melancholy pleasure walking for one last time through the haunts of all his bitter-sweet romance. . . .

In his various trips about the city that were necessarily antecedent to his going, he had one more glance of the Enchantress in her totality.

He had gone up to the twenty-second story of one of the tallest office-buildings in the down-town district. The editor whom he wanted to see was busy, and he stood at a window in the outer office and gazed over toward the North River. By turning his head he had also a glimpse of the East Side, and of the more peaceful waters beyond. It was late afternoon; the sun was westerling, but had not set; an autumnal clarity and purity filled the atmosphere; each slightest detail was visible, from the gold edges of the clouds that floated above the farthest horizon to the pigmy-like men and horses on the street immediately beneath the building. In the room in which he stood the silence was

complete, and he could hear from far below the throb of the city's mighty life. He stepped nearer to the window and saw the gilded masts and rigging of innumerable ships. These sailed afar over the adventurous sea, in cleansing gales, alone with the eternal things of the universe. But that pale crowd running about so madly and feverishly in the narrow streets, hemmed in by tall buildings, what of it? Each unit of it toiled to fill a need of himself and others, and so each one gained a livelihood, and one link of the endless chain ran into another. But the whole chain—this was the appalling thought—was a circle. It did not stretch out; it led nowhither. Men toiled in these cañons built by themselves, and the result was merely life and more life; not wisdom, not beauty, not spiritual greatness, but merely life. And Herbert felt as if one ought to condemn that blind force which led all these creatures to strive and cry and sell their goods and their souls merely for a continuation in themselves and their offspring of the same fever which animates the common dust called—man. Some-

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how, it was different out in the quieter places of the land. A little while in which to think, in which to be with his own soul, seemed there to come to every man; whereas, here there was nothing but business and pleasure—equally soulless and useless.

The sun sank below the horizon, and the slim skyscrapers seemed to lean against the crimson sky; points of radiant flame glittered at the mastheads of the happy ships, and in the streets sprang up the glow of many lights. The pulse of the city's life seemed to deepen into a sob, the sob of a monstrous giant, a blind immortal Titan, chained by the implacable gods to an enduring round of barren toil. . . .

Herbert attended to his business, and then rode uptown for the last time. Without any hesitation, he made his way to a certain house in a certain street, although his heart beat fast and the hand with which he touched the button of the electric-bell trembled. He asked if Miss Castle was at home, and was ushered into the library which he remembered so well. In a few minutes she came down, clad in a smoothly

flowing cream gown—a little paler, a little more transparent and spiritual than when he had seen her last.

“My hope has come true,” he said at once, and without ceremony.

“The hope that you would come here again!” She laughed a little nervously. “It’s not such a formidable thing, after all.”

“But it was symbolical,” he said, gravely, “and even now I have come for but a single time. I leave the city to-morrow.”

“Permanently?” she asked.

He shook his head.

“No; but for long.”

Her eyes looked earnestly into his.

“I have followed your success with such pleasure. Your work seemed to me so truly felt and so adequately done.”

He bowed his head in acknowledgment of her words, but he had a graver purpose to pursue.

“I am alone; I have been alone for many weeks; I am going away to be alone with myself, and a few pure and dear things. Do you understand?”

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She lowered her eyes.

“Fred has told me enough; I understand.”

He took her hand.

“And whether I am going away never to return or not depends on you—on you alone. I have been through deep waters, and words sound very vain and idle. May I come back?”

She let her hand rest in his and the glance of her eyes melt into his. They knew that for them the immortal secret had been spoken once and for all, but she said only these simple words:

“You may—come back. . . .”

THE END





